

"Work is Worth It"
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Ephesians 4:28
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Charlie McCarthy, Edgar Bergen's dummy, used to say, "Hard work never killed anybody, but why take the chances." That is not found in the Bible. As we grow and mature in the Christian faith, we realize that following Jesus Christ means a new perspective on every aspect of life, including our attitude toward work. We will focus on just one verse, Ephesians 4:28. Last week we talked about how the Lord wants us to get control of our anger, tame our temper. Today we will see that, as a believer in Jesus, we need to develop a new attitude toward work and income. The Lord tells us through the apostle Paul, **Ephesians 4:28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing something to share with anyone in need.** Let's pause and pray the Lord would help us understand and apply this important part of His word.

Paul begins by telling us that we need to stop stealing. Now, I don't think many Christians in Ephesus were first century burglars, bank robbers or even pick pockets. Yes, Jesse James and his brother Frank were sons of a Baptist preacher, so I suppose a Christian could end up a bank robber, but I don't think that is what Paul had in mind. He is, however, clearly affirming God's commandment, the eighth commandment, "Thou shalt not steal." Robbing banks, shoplifting, taking money out of your mom's purse, sneaking home postage stamps from work, are actions that violate both the laws of the state of Minnesota and God's law. Do not steal. This type of behavior absolutely has no place in a Christian's life.

I think, however, that Paul is also thinking about other types of stealing. There is an old Norman Rockwell painting that shows a woman buying a turkey. As the bird lies on the store scale, she is discreetly pushing up on the scale to make the turkey appear lighter. The grocer is pushing down to make the scale read heavier. Both are trying to steal a little money from the other. Friends whenever we take advantage of someone financially, we are guilty of stealing. We are, in a sense, a thief. The employer who fails to pay a fair wage to his workers, the employee who sluffs off on the job, and the person who doesn't make an effort to pay back the money that he has borrowed are all stealing. Failure to report cash

income on your tax return is not only lying, it is stealing. And don't pretend you need the money more than the government. They are trillions of dollars in debt. I have seen a Christian take advantage of an insurance company and use the same logic as shoplifters do, "It is a big company. They are not going to miss the money I'm collecting for work I never had done." Yet, no matter how we try to rationalize, it is still stealing. And I think the Lord would say, you are still a thief.

Another tragic form of stealing is a Christian individual or organization that, in God's name, asks for money and then uses it for personal benefit or for other purposes than for what the money was given. That is stealing. I believe manipulating people or deceiving them in order to get them to give more money is a form of stealing. I guess it is not surprising that Paul warns the Ephesians not to steal, since in our day we have leaders in numerous churches that do exactly that. But it is not supposed to be that way. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, your life should be different. **Ephesians 4:28a Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor.**

Now there may be some in this room who need to heed this basic message the Lord has for us: "Do not steal." As far as I know, no one here ever robbed an armored car or anything like that, but if we have been guilty of taking or keeping what does not belong to us, we need to acknowledge that as a sin, confess it to the Lord, repent, and seek to make restitution.

Yes, often, the Lord desires that we pay back what we have stolen. That is what repentance and restitution involves. Zacchaeus does this in Luke 19 after he becomes a follower of Jesus. He pays back people four times the amount that he had taken from them. We don't want to be like the man who wrote a letter to the IRS which read, "I have been unable to sleep at night. Enclosed you will find \$300 for taxes on income that I failed to report last year. If I am still not able to sleep, I will send you the other \$600." A better model is a 31-year old man in Dallas who, 15 years earlier, stole \$40 from an amusement park. He sent that company a check for \$120, the \$40 plus \$80

interest. That is full restitution. This may seem like a hard thing to do, it might be embarrassing, but if it is possible to make restitution to someone from whom you have stolen, you need to do that. Do it because being embarrassed is a lot less painful than not doing what the Lord wants you to do.

Second, Paul says we need to be working. **Ephesians 4:28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands.** Here Paul affirms something the Bible clearly teaches. Work is a good thing. It is not always fun, but it is good. Even before sin entered the world, **Genesis 2:15** says, **the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.** Or other versions say “to take care of it.” In our text, Paul specifically affirms the value of manual labor. **Ephesians 4:28b Let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands.** Now, some of us work a lot more with our heads and mouths than our hands. I don’t think that would bother Paul, but I also think he would agree with Mike Rowe that dirty jobs are often good ones. This verse reminds me that even though I have a couple of Masters Degrees, I should not look down on those who have callouses on their hands and dirt under their fingernails. If the Lord has called you to do some type of manual labor, you have an opportunity to bring glory to God just as much as a pastor does. Your job is no less valuable than that of a bank president, or the President of the United States. Why? Because nothing matters more than doing the will of God. If you are doing the work the Lord calls you to do and with the right attitude, that is what counts, because that work is good.

Okay Pastor Dan, “To whom does this apply?” What about people who have physical or even psychological limitations that keep them from working? Well Paul says, those able to work need to do so and share with those who cannot. “Well, how about me, Pastor Dan? I am retired. In theory, I don’t work anymore.” In that case, though you don’t have a job, you are still to use your time and energy in a way that honors the Lord. Numerous people in our congregation are over 70 years old and retired, but they continue to do important volunteer work in both the church and community. A few, like Roger Johnson, are still working hard in their 90’s, yet retired folks are not required to work as Paul commands. If you are

a student in school, you should be working hard. But that doesn’t mean you need to have a job where you make money. Often that is a good idea, but for the few years you are in school, studying is often your primary work.

Sometimes folks work very hard, but are not paid for what they do. Stay at home moms and different volunteer workers are in this category. Though these folks are not directly paid for their work, what they do is important. As a church we are very dependent on volunteers and would have a huge church budget if we paid our Sunday School teachers, nursery workers, etc. My main point is that a stay at home mom or volunteer worker fulfills Paul’s command that we should each work.

Yet, why is it so important to work? It is a good thing to do because it is what God intends us to do. Part of the reason God has placed each of us on earth is so that we might work. Another reason to work and make money is so that we will not be a financial burden to others. Paul worked at making tents so he could pay his expenses and not depend on the financial support of the people to whom he was ministering. A third reason to work is so you can support your family financially. Traditionally this has been the husband’s role as the “breadwinner,” but there is nothing wrong with a wife sharing in this role. And if you are a single mom, you are likely the “breadwinner” for your family. We should take seriously what the Lord tells us in **1 timothy 5:8 But if anyone does not provide for his relatives and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.** Wow, I have never heard of anyone being disciplined by a church for failing to provide for his/her family, but Paul says it is a big deal.

So we should work because it is what the Lord intends for us to do because we don’t want to rely on financial support from others, and because we need to provide financially for our family. Those are three good reasons, but there is another one that Paul highlights in this text. Paul says a reason we need to work is so that we will have money to give to people in need. **Ephesians 4:28 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.**

Friends, for many years I read this verse without really noticing what Paul actually says. In our society, we usually think in terms of having a job so we can get money to meet our needs and fulfill our desires. The Lord, through Paul, says “That has to change.” Because of our new relationship with the Lord, because we are being made into new people, we need to view our jobs differently. One of the reasons you should get up and go to work tomorrow, is so that you will be able to give part of your paycheck to someone else. That may sound crazy. However, if it does, it indicates you are not thinking clearly about what it means to be a new person through Jesus. Back in 4:22 Paul says we are to take off the old self, and put on the new self. As a Christian I am to have a new attitude that says, “I am willing to work and make money so that I can give some of it away.” Frankly, I think the only way you develop that attitude is if God’s spirit is working in your life, changing you from a selfish person to a generous one. That only happens when you are a genuine Christian, someone trusting in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Let me remind you of the law/gospel tension here. I suspect few, if any of us are as generous as God wants us to be. The good news is because Jesus died on the cross in my place, I have already been forgiven for my stingy attitudes and actions. I experience the forgiveness when, 1 John 1:9, I confess my sin and the Lord forgives me and cleanses me from the shame of my sin. And then, at that point, the Lord says, “Ok, let’s work on this generosity thing.” For me, and I hope for you, even though I am prone to being a bit stingy, because of gratitude toward and love for the Lord, I want to be more generous.

Ok, let’s talk about some of the practical issues. To whom should we give money? Paul says share with anyone in need. I think he specifically has in mind giving to other members of the church who have a financial need. Maybe someone, for whatever reason, has not been able to work enough to meet his/her expenses. Or maybe the person has some unexpected bills to pay. Whatever the case we need to be willing to share with each other. Now, certainly the Lord has no problem with us giving money to people outside the church. Some of you remember that in the early church, Acts 2, there was an experiment with semi-communal living, where Christians owned at least some things together. It is an interesting

practice, but no to share with those in need is what God asks us to do. This is a command for every Christian, living on every part of the globe. This is His command for us, for you. The question is, are you obeying it? Are you sharing with those in need?

How much money should we give to help meet the needs of others? That is something each person has to determine. In 1 Corinthians 9:7, the apostle Paul tells us to give willingly and cheerfully. But how much? In the Old Testament the people were to give a tithe, 10% to support the priests and the temple and then an additional tithe every third year for the poor. The New Testament tells us to give generously and proportionally both to support the church and to help those in need. What C.S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity* is helpful and challenging. He said, “Giving to the poor is an essential part of Christian morality. I am afraid the only safe rule as to how much we ought to give is more than we can spare. If our expenditures on comforts, luxuries, and amusements are as much as those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving too little. There ought to be things we should like to do but can’t because our charitable expenditure excludes them.”

Friends, that seems like a tough standard, but it does seem to reflect what our text says. In order to share as Paul commands, us to do, we need to have income and we need to control our spending. I think every Christian individual or family, should seek to have more income than expenses. Your family or personal budget should be operating in the black, with a surplus. This may not always be realistic, but it should be our goal. We want to have extra money so that we are able to give to those in need.

How do we get the money we give to people in need? Well, giving to groups like “Samaritans Purse,” “Food for the Hungry,” or “the Salvation Army” are good ways to do it. I suggest you give to organizations who are not just helping people, but are doing so in Jesus’ name. Remember, the United Way and even Amazon and Facebook allow you to choose what organizations will receive your donations. Yet, Paul’s primary concern is that Christian within a church help each other. You should be willing to share with others in this room. This is not some utopian dream, but what the Lord actually expects of us at Chisholm

Baptist Church. How do we do that? Well. There is nothing wrong with going up to someone after the worship service and saying, "Hey, I know you had some extra expenses with your car last month, so I just want to give you \$50." Or maybe you put \$100 in an envelope and stick it under someone's door as an anonymous gift. On numerous occasions someone has given me cash and said, "Pastor Dan, will you please give this to so and so for me, but don't tell them who it is from." I am honored to be trusted like that, and glad to do it. Or you can buy someone a bag of groceries, take someone out to lunch, volunteer to provide free child care. Those are all ways to help someone who doesn't have much money.

Or you can give through our church benevolent fund. Each year we give thousands of dollars from this account to people in the congregation who are in financial need. Just make a notation on your gift and the deacons will make sure the money is used for this purpose. And continue to give of your money, time, and energy to Chisholm Baptist Church and other Christian ministries. Many folks out there can use help meeting their basic needs for food and shelter. However, the biggest problem many people have is (Ephesians 2:12) they are without hope, and without God in this world. The gospel, the truth about Jesus Christ and what He has done for us is most important thing anyone needs. No matter how much or how little money they have.

One of my favorite stories is about a church down south that had a leaky roof, badly in need of repair. One Sunday morning, the pastor said, "Before we leave today, I'd like to raise enough money to fix this roof. It will cost about \$30,000 to do that, but I know some of you could write a check for that much yourself. I would like someone to pledge \$2,000 to help with the project. Please raise your hand if you are willing to give \$2000." No one said a word or moved. Frustrated, the pastor said, "Jim Nelson, how about you? You are a successful businessman. Would you be willing to give \$2000 to help fix the roof?" Jim Nelson slowly stood up and said, "Well preacher, there are some things about me you maybe don't know. My mother-in-law has been in the hospital for two weeks and has some huge medical bills. My brother in Atlanta lost his job and has been out of work for two months. He has a wife and four kids to feed. And the engine on my daughter's car just blew up and

she needs \$3000 to fix it... And preacher, if I can say "No" to the three of them, I can say "No" to you too."

Friends, you can say, "No" to me if you like, but if God is calling you to give and help folks in need, don't say no to Him. **Ephesians 4:28 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.**