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Sermon Notes

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A Transformed Life of Labor, Love, and Godly Speech

Ephesians 4:28-29

Today's text is made up of two verses... ethical commands. One of them may at first glance affect very few of us, and the other affects every one of us at every waking moment of the day.

Verse 28 commands Christians who have been stealing to steal no longer... THIEVES... that is a term very few people in the Christian church would even remotely consider belongs to them. We'll address that today, but honestly, if we talked to a person who became a Christian and he or she said "I was a thief," it is not one of the common sins that people confess to.

On the other hand, verse 29 address the way each one of us uses our mouths... our speech patterns, and it commands us to forsake any unwholesome speech, but instead ONLY to say things that build others up. This we know is immediately relevant to all of us every single hour of the day.

Here is the marvel of the gospel of Jesus Christ!! The scope and breadth of the life of godliness it effects, of the variety of sinners it saves! Amazing!

Romans 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

I. The Gospel Alone Produces Godly Living

A. All Christian Ethics Flow from the Gospel

1. We are in the MORAL section of Paul's epistle in which he is commanding a godly pattern of life

Ephesians 4:1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

2. BUT WHAT IS THAT? It is a godly life, a moral life, a life in conformity with God's moral law, and in conformity with the pattern of Jesus Christ
3. Many non-Christians can live moral lives... they can be completely upright in the issue of stealing or hard work or generosity to the poor
4. BUT Christian ethics are different... Christian morality flows from FAITH IN CHRIST... from understanding that everything we do should glorify God and exalt God... everything comes in obedience to the two great commandments

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength

Love your neighbor as yourself

5. AND obedience flows from faith in Christ

John 15:5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

6. So the exact same life of moral uprightness... of not stealing but working and giving to the poor; of pure, moral speech... that pattern in a non-Christian does not flow from a zeal for the glory of God and a love for neighbor because he is in the image of God... and it certainly does not flow from ABIDING in Christ by faith!

B. The Truly Converted Sinner Lives a New Life

1. Basic concept here... if you are truly converted, if you truly have faith in Christ, it will affect the way you live

Romans 6:1-2 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

2. A lifestyle of ungodliness shows that the person has not really been saved through faith in Christ

1 John 3:9-10 No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. ¹⁰ This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.

3. So living a life worthy of the Lord Jesus Christ is the essential PROOF that Christ has forgiven you of your sins, that he has entered your heart by the Holy Spirit

1 John 1:6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.

4. And to live the life of a thief is to walk in darkness... to speak unwholesome words that corrupt the people around you is to walk in darkness

5. Unconverted thieves DO NOT GO TO HEAVEN

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: thieves will NOT inherit the kingdom of God.

A simple warning from the Scripture... if you are an unrepentant thief, you will not inherit the Kingdom of God

BUT the gospel has power to transform thieves and save their souls!

1 Corinthians 6:11 "And such WERE some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

C. The Transformed Life is Both Negative and Positive

1. Basic pattern of holiness: Put off the old, put on the new

Ephesians 4:22-24 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to

put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

2. Already seen once:

Ephesians 4:25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

3. Now, we'll see it two more times:

a. Negative: Put off stealing; Positive: work hard with your hands and give to the needy

b. Negative: put off unwholesome words; Positive: speak only what builds up your neighbor

4. There are some things we **MUST NOT DO...** and there are **CORRESPONDING THINGS THAT WE MUST DO**

5. This teaches the "expulsive power of a holy desire"

19th century Scottish pastor Thomas Chalmers, "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection"

Two ways to get someone to behave morally: 1) by showing how evil and corrupt is the sin, and by creating a revulsion from it so that the person draws back from that wicked pattern of life; 2) by showing how delightful and beautiful is God and his holy ways so that, by attraction the person yearns to live that kind of a life.

Chalmers says the practical moralist is unsuccessful in achieving morality by only being negative... Don't do this, don't do that! But that's ALL. That's not enough!

Rather, Christian morality shows the two side by side by contrast so that we BOTH see how evil sin is, AND how delightfully attractive holiness is... and the greater desire for the delight will DRIVE OUT the evil behavior

The Apostle Paul does that here

6. BUT he MUST be negative... not only positive... he must tell us clearly the evils that must no longer be part of the Christian life
 - a. And Stealing
 - b. And Corrupt speech MUST be put to death!!

D. The Gospel Saves All Kinds of Sinners

1. The fact that many of us DO NOT struggle with stealing (for the most part) should not surprise us
2. The gospel SAVES ALL DIFFERENT KINDS OF SINNERS!!
3. There is a remedy for the lifetime thief! And the church can be filled with former thieves as well as former sinners of every kind
4. This is a worldwide message of hope to sinners of all kinds

Matthew 11:28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Isaiah 45:22 "Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.

5. The church at Ephesus was probably made up of people who came from some very rough backgrounds
6. They needed to be told that their lifestyle HAD to change!

E. Genuine Conversion Doesn't End the Battle... But Really Begins It!

1. Another clear implication here: just because you're converted, it doesn't mean the battle with sin is over
2. In many ways, it's just beginning
3. You have been living a certain kind of life before Christ
4. Now you are called TO WAR against sin

Romans 8:13-14 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body,

you will live, ¹⁴ because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

F. The Focus Here: Stealing and Corrupt Speech

G. Common Theme: Storing Up to Benefit Others

1. Hands... Labor... Sharing goods with those in need
2. Heart... Labor... Sharing words with those in need
3. Common: Two Great Commandments become one... loving God by loving and serving neighbor with HANDS and MOUTH

II. Not Stealing But Labor, Love, and Generosity (vs. 28)

Ephesians 4:28 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.

A. Defining Stealing

1. One of the Ten Commandments

Exodus 20:15 “You shall not steal.”

2. Fundamental concept: private ownership... “Mine” and “Yours”

[Peter to Ananias] *Acts 5:4 Didn't the property belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal?*

3. Definition

To steal = to take another person's property without permission or legal right without intending to return it, especially secretly or by force

4. A bigger problem than you may think:

Few of us would commit armed robbery... but it is amazing how many of us might be tempted to steal if we were absolutely certain of never getting caught; and many of us may rationalize

small actions that we will be surprised on Judgment Day to find that God considered them stealing

According to Fortune Magazine, shoplifting and worker theft cost retailers 32 billion dollars last year! THIRTY-TWO BILLION dollars! And that drives the cost of groceries and retail products like clothing and electronics UP, because the stores have to protect themselves from loss

That figure includes shoplifting and employee theft, as well as vendor theft

Wal-Mart alone loses about \$300 million per year to theft

Supermarkets lose the highest percentage of sales to theft... and it inevitably drives up the cost of our groceries

A shoplifter swiping a book at Barnes and Noble or a blouse at Macy's

I was buying some vacuum cleaner belts at Lowe's a month ago and wanted to get an extra bag of the belts to save time... but good thing I looked carefully, because one of the bags I would have bought had been opened and the belt removed. Very hard for the store to detect that.

E-theft also... internet theft, identity theft, etc.

This is a HUGE problem... but does it include everyone?

B. Is this *Really* Stealing?

1. What if you purposely take an extra wad of napkins from Chick-Fil-A to store in your car?
2. How about using company stationery or machines to do personal business?
3. Certainly we're aware of the need to be honest with our taxes... for to defraud the government is stealing, no matter what you think about taxes

4. Time: not working diligently for your company... not putting in a full day's work

Ephesians 6:6-7 Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. ⁷ Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men,

5. Plagiarism: using other people's work as if it were your own

C. The Corrupt Use of the Hands... and the Mind

1. Amazing bodies... "fearfully and wonderfully made"
2. Paul focuses on the thieves' hands... skillful perhaps at pickpocketing
 - a. They have physical strength, but they are MISUSING IT to steal
 - b. Go beyond that to the mind... the astonishing use of creativity, of ingenuity, even of genius in some of these professional thieves
 - c. Very much the object of many movies... the stunningly clever thief who pulls off the crime of the century... who concocts a fool-proof plan, and executes it with amazing precision

Sean Connery in "The Great Train Robbery"

Paul Newman and Robert Redford in both "The Sting" and "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid"

George Clooney and Brad Pitt in "Ocean's Eleven"

Basic rule in these movies is, if the guy you're stealing from is a bad man, you are entitled to do it, like Robin Hood who stole from the rich to give to the poor

But what's being celebrated in the movie is inevitably the BRILLIANCE of the MINDS of the thieves... the cleverness of the plan

- d. Vic Carpenter, FBI, white collar crime, stunned by what a WASTE these criminals have made of their intellect and talents
- e. Fundamentally, these folks have taken amazing gifts of God and corrupted them

D. The Staggering Selfishness of Stealing

1. The individual doesn't care at all about the needs of the victim
2. There is a total focus on self, what I want
3. That's why Paul is going to give the remedy of serving OTHERS here

E. The Remedy: Stop Doing It! (By the Power of the Spirit)

1. It's not a matter of praying that God will magically take this habit away
2. As if until God takes the desire to steal away, there's nothing you can do
3. The command is blunt and forceful: STOP STEALING!!
4. Now all such commands are understood in the Christian life as only being done by the power of the Spirit
 - a. The Spirit works deep conviction in you BASED ON THE WORD OF GOD
 - b. You see the evil of the action and hate it
 - c. By the power of the Spirit you put the sin to death!
5. By the power of the Spirit, ALSO you see the beauty of what comes next

Ephesians 4:28 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.

F. Repenting from Living Selfishly for Pleasure and Ease

1. The life of a thief is a life of selfishness, love of pleasure and ease
2. It is a life of shortcuts, of despising honest labor
3. Of trying to get an edge, of avoiding the suffering of the normal worklife
4. It is driven out by learning to love God and love others more than you love yourself
5. To say I LIVE FOR THE GLORY OF GOD and to reduce the suffering of people around me...
6. This is the exact opposite of the life of the thief

G. Delighting in Work

1. The thief HATES work
2. The Christian DELIGHTS in work
3. God put Adam in the Garden of Eden to “work it and take care of it”
 - a. All of the basic ingredients were there
 - b. A WORLD to be explored and developed
 - c. God gave Adam a brilliant mind and an amazing body
 - d. Hands to grip tools, a mind to understand principles of agriculture and technology

Genesis 2:19 Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.

God: “Show me what you are capable of doing!”

4. To repent from theft is to work diligently
5. The Greek word is LABOR... working HARD, TOILING till exhaustion

H. The Puritan Work Ethic

1. Wherever the true gospel comes and takes root, sloth, laziness, hatred of honest labor go away... along with THEFT...
2. Instead people delight in developing their craft to the glory of God
3. The English Puritans were excellent examples of people who loved ALL honest labor and sought to make furniture or print books or bake bread or run a merchant's shop or be a tailor TO THE GLORY OF GOD
4. This tremendous work ethic drove out a frivolous lifestyle of pleasure-seeking; it made the craftsman make an EXCELLENT product that the consumer would WANT to buy; and it brought PROSPERITY
5. This extra wealth was available to give to the POOR and NEEDY

I. Living to Serve Others According to their Needs

1. The former thief is now living for God and for neighbor
2. He wants to alleviate suffering
3. He believes his honest wages have brought about prosperity not to increase his standard of living but his standard of giving
4. He now has something to SHARE with those in need

2 Corinthians 8:15 "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little."

J. Paul's Amazing Example to the Ephesian Elders

Acts 20:33-35 I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. ³⁵ In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

K. The Dangerous Severing of Money from Work

1. Theft: money gained without working for it
2. Inheritance... money given to the non-needy without working for it (not in itself wrong, but it can be dangerous)
3. Lottery...
4. Gambling...
5. Even benevolence given to the capable; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-10 warned the idle and the lazy... and warned against giving benevolent money to them

2 Thessalonians 3:6-10 "If a man will not work, he shall not eat."

L. Summary and Application

1. Ask God to show you examples of theft in your own life if there are any
2. Embrace the principle of hard work that results in extra money that can be given to those genuinely in need
3. Even if you're not really tempted to steal, there's still a lesson on the value of HARD WORK for the purpose of SHARING WITH THOSE IN NEED
4. The more skillful you become in your craft, the more money you will make;
5. What is your pattern of giving to the poor and needy?
6. Randy Alcorn says God gives us more money not simply to raise our standard of living but our standard of giving

III. Not Corrupt Speech, But Love and Edification (vs. 29)

Ephesians 4:29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

A. The Mouth Filter

We're on a well...

Whole-house water filter: able to filter out harmful or distasteful materials from our drinking water

1. This verse is like a MOUTH filter
2. The exclusivity of the verse...

Ephesians 4:29 Do not let ANY unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but ONLY what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

3. Paul wants the Ephesians to ask at every moment BEFORE we speak... “If what I’m about to say ‘helpful for building others up according to their needs? Will it BENEFIT those who listen?’”
4. If not, you shouldn’t say it!!

B. The Marvelous Gift of Speech and the Image of God

1. Created in the image of God
2. The power of speech is a great evidence of the vast gulf that separates us from the animals
3. It is also one of the greatest displays of the power and wisdom of God... he created the world with WORDS and redeems sinners by the WORDS of the gospel
4. It is therefore one of the key areas that Satan seeks to attack
5. Three times in this section of Ephesians, Paul addresses SPEECH
 - a. Lying in 4:29
 - b. Here on unwholesome speech
 - c. Coarse joking and filthy language in 5:3
6. Speech must be a HUGE issue of the Christian life!!

C. “Unwholesome talk”: an amazing gift gone bad

1. The word in the Greek means “rotten, putrefied, corrupted”... like meat that is rancid, sitting out on the counter in July for the

weekend when you get home; or like fruit in the bottom of the barrel where there is some water

2. Any word that HURTS a person
 - a. Verbal attacks, insults, slander, fighting words, arguments, gossip, lies
 - b. Complaining is included... it is a very depressing thing to listen to
 - c. Certainly false doctrine or blasphemy
 - d. As Paul will say in 5:3 coarse language, filthy jokes, swear words. Etc.
 - e. But even just EMPTY CHATTER... endless worldly talk about the big game or the weather... while in and of itself it is not corrupt, the SECULARIZING FEEL is corrupt, and you missed a chance to BUILD YOUR NEIGHBOR UP
3. Think of how much damage is done by a single verbal attack... saying something cutting or mean, then later saying that you didn't really mean it, or trying to make the relationship right
4. These words TEAR DOWN the unity of the body

D. Out of the Fullness of the Heart the Mouth Speaks

1. The reason words are so vital is that they reflect the status of someone's heart

***Matthew 12:34-35 out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵
The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him,
and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.***

2. The words of the mouth reflect the contents of the heart
3. The key to being able to BLESS other people with your words is to BLESS THEM FIRST in your heart... to pray for them and desire blessing for them... to think godly thoughts about them

4. If your heart is hard toward other people, at some point your mouth with overflow the contents of the heart
5. Judgment Day:

Matthew 12:36-37 But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. ³⁷ For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.

- a. The cumulative record of our words is a perfectly accurate reflection of the state of your heart
 - b. All Jesus will need to do is recount your words and he will reveal your heart
 - c. If your heart is CORRUPT, then you will speak CORRUPT WORDS
6. So...

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-- think about such things.

E. James 3: The Restless Evil of the Tongue

1. The problem of the tongue is well-known in the Bible...
2. James 3 especially reveals how difficult it is to be PERFECT in speech

James 3:2 We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.

3. The tongue is a relentless, restless evil

James 3:6-8 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. ⁷ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have

been tamed by man, ⁸ but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

4. For this reason, we need this MOUTH FILTER

Psalm 141:3 Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips.

Illustration: like the guards at a maximum security prison; their primary job is to keep the murderers inside the walls, unable to flood into the community where they will do immense damage

So we pray to God, "Set a guard over the door of my mouth"

LET NOTHING COME OUT THAT IS HARMFUL OR CORRUPT!

LET ONLY GODLY WORDS COME OUT, WORDS THAT WILL BUILD UP MY NEIGHBOR!!

Need to **slow down** in our speech... think about what you're about to say:

James 1:19 My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry

Ponder your words... ask yourself if they glorify God and build the neighbor up

FCC, Networks have used a SEVEN-SECOND DELAY in their live broadcasts to give censors a chance to bleep out profanity or shield the audience from shocking events like violence.

We need to be SLOW TO SPEAK and pass everything through the Ephesians 4:29 filter... "Does what I am about to say benefit those who listen according to their needs? Does it build them up in Christ?"

F. Romans 3: the Unconverted Tongue

Romans 3:13-14 "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on their lips." ¹⁴ "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."

That is what we were converted FROM!!

That is the sin nature still inside us!

We have to make the tongue a servant of God's purposes, God's glory

G. The Focus: Love for Neighbor... God's Goal: His Glory in Salvation!

Ephesians 4:29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

^{ESV} Ephesians 4:29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

1. God's goal is salvation for the elect
2. He has ordained words to that end... words that GIVE GRACE... feeding the work of salvation in the heart of everyone who listens
3. Paul uses the image of edification... building up the neighbor in love
 - a. Harkens back to the image of the church rising as it is built up

Ephesians 2:21-22 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

- b. Gospel for their salvation
 - c. The ongoing teaching of the word for their sanctification, growth toward Christlikeness
4. BUILD UP your neighbor... give them hope, power, insight

H. A Whole New Purpose for Words

Ephesians 4:15-16 speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole

body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

1. Morning quiet time... saturate your mind and heart in the word of God
2. Isaiah 50 speaks of Jesus' quiet times:

Isaiah 50:4 The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom

3. Why? So you will have something to SHARE WITH THOSE IN NEED, just like we were saying about the work of the hands
4. So, study the word in the morning to get a message of encouragement to give to people you meet throughout the day

I. Studying the Needs of Your Neighbor

"...according to their needs, that it may give grace..."

1. Pray for people... find out what they're going through
 - a. Maybe a trial of huge proportions
 - b. Perhaps a medical or financial issue
 - c. Perhaps the marriage is in trouble
 - d. Perhaps a child or spouse is seriously ill
2. Find out where they're at in their discipleship... how do they need to grow
3. Are they doctrinally immature? Are they needing encouragement?
4. Perhaps there is a sin issue and what would build them up and benefit them would be a word of warning or correction or even rebuke; but BE SURE it is the right time and you are the right person, and you have the right motive and manner

Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.

J. Social Clues: Studying the Needs of the Moment

Proverbs 25:11 A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.

1. "According to their NEEDS..."
2. Some moments are better than others
3. Be socially adept and aware... is this the right moment to share the gospel with your coworker? Is there enough time to go into what you learned in your quiet time with a fellow church member you see at Kroger? They may be giving off clues of being in a rush... don't be socially backward, unable to pick up social cues
4. Have you invested the time to get to know this person? Perhaps that's what has to happen FIRST!

K. Final Application:

1. Trust in Christ for salvation!
2. The last thing I want you to do if you're a non-Christian is a set of moral do's and don'ts
3. Trust in Christ! He will cleanse you from sin and empower you by the Spirit
4. Once that happens, you will be able to live out this godly Christian life