

The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON C1 : PRACTICAL INJUNCTIONS ABOUT THE OLD AND NEW LIFE (4:25-5:2)

Ephesians 4:28 —

Let him that stole steale no moare but let him rather laboure with his hondes some good thinge that he maye have to geve vnto him that nedeth. (Tyndale's New Testament, 1534)

Let him that stole, steale no more: but let him rather labour, and worke with his handes the thing which is good, that hee may haue to giue vnto him that needeth. (Geneva Bible, 1599)

Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. (King James Version, 1769)

whoso is stealing let him no more steal, but rather let him labour, working the thing that is good with the hands, that he may have to impart to him having need. (Young's Literal Translation, 1898)

Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have whereof to give to him that hath need. (Revised Version, 1885)

Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have whereof to give to him that hath need. (American Standard Version, 1901)

Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need. (Revised Standard Version, 1952)

The one who is stealing, let him no longer be stealing, but rather let him be laboring, working with his own hands that which is good, in order that he may be having that wherewith to be sharing with the one who is having need. (Kenneth Wuest's Expanded Translation, 1961)

Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. (New King James Version, 1982)

He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. (New American Standard Version, 1995)

Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. (New International Version, 2011)

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. (English Standard Version, 2016)

ὁ κλέπτων μηκέτι κλεπτέτω μάλλον δὲ κοπιάτω ἐργαζόμενος τὸ ἀγαθὸν ταῖς χερσὶν ἵνα ἔχη μεταδιδόναι τῷ χρεῖαν ἔχοντι (Stephanus Greek NT, 1550)

ὁ κλέπτων μηκέτι κλεπτέτω, μάλλον δὲ κοπιάτω ἐργαζόμενος ταῖς [ιδίαις] χερσὶν τὸ ἀγαθόν, ἵνα ἔχη μεταδιδόναι τῷ χρεῖαν ἔχοντι. (NA28 Greek New Testament)

Stealing

negatively ...

positively ...

motivational clause

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.

V. 28 — **whoso is stealing let him no more steal, but rather let him labour, working the thing that is good with the hands, that he may have to impart to him having need.** — ὁ κλέπτων μηκέτι κλεπτέτω μάλλον δὲ κοπιάτω ἐργαζόμενος τὸ ἀγαθὸν ταῖς χερσὶν ἵνα ἔχη μεταδιδόναι τῷ χρεῖαν ἔχοντι [ho kleptōn mēketi kleptetō mallon de kopiatō ergazomenos to agathon tais chersin hina echē metadidonai tō chreian echonti] — *“All of us come into the world for a brief time, and we spend most of it yelling ‘Pay attention to me!’ We feel justified in satisfying ourselves, even at cost to others. From the time we are old enough to recognize objects, we want what the other person has — if for no other reason, so that they will not have it. Ephesians 4:28 ignites a bomb under all our self-centered thinking. Our goal is not enjoyment; it is productivity so that we can give. We do not exist for ourselves, but for relations with other people and with God... We live in a society of takers, one that mocks the ‘Puritan’ work ethic. But we have been created in the image of God to enter into his creative activity, that is, to*

work. In failing to be productive we fail to live up to our vocation as humans. Possibly the strongest witness Christians can make is to become givers. The concern is not about giving money, which is at most ancillary to the text. The concern is working to benefit others.” [Snodgrass, 258] “‘Thou shalt not steal’ is one of the Ten Commandments, and when God gave that commandment, He instituted the right of private ownership of property. A man has the right to turn his strength into gain, and to keep that gain and use it as he sees fit. God gave numerous laws to the Jews for the protection of their property, and these principles have become a part of our law today.” [Wiersbe, 41] “No one is completely free from the temptation to steal. Many children go through a phase of thinking it is fun to steal, sometimes simply for the sake of stealing. There is a certain fleshly attraction in taking that which does not belong to us and trying to get by with it. The old self had a built-in inclination to steal, and that is one of the many characteristics of the old self that ‘the new self, which [is] in the likeness of God’ (v. 24) puts away. The Christian is to steal [klepto, from which comes kleptomaniac] no longer.... Grand larceny, petty theft, taking some of your dad’s money off the dresser, renegeing on a debt, not paying fair wages, or pocketing what a clerk overpays in change are all stealing. There is simply no end to ways we can steal, and whatever the ways are and whatever the chances for being caught, stealing is sin and has no part in the new walk of the new man in Christ.” [MacArthur, 186]

whoso is stealing let him no more steal, — ὁ κλέπτων μηκέτι κλεπτέτω [ho kleptōn mēketi kleptetō] — WHILE THE PREVIOUS INJUNCTIONS WERE IN THE PLURAL, THIS IS IN THE MASCULINE SINGULAR — “The area of conduct treated here changes abruptly (there is no connecting particle) and is *in the singular unlike the preceding and following injunctions. In the other exhortations the plural could cover both sexes, the singular here would normally not; the masculine is appropriate since women in most parts of the ancient world were not in a position to earn money; if they were in need, they turned to prostitution rather than theft.*” [Best, 452; see also Hoehner, 624]

THE GRAMMAR SUGGESTS THIS IS NOT SPEAKING OF FORMER THIEVES BUT CHRISTIANS WHO WERE CONTINUING TO STEAL — ‘The thief, the one who is stealing’ is a present participle and along with the adverb ‘no longer’ indicates this was an on-going activity, not pre-Christian acts. This is also stressed by the command ‘do not steal’ being in the present tense (present imperative). [Best, 453; O’Brien, 342; Hoehner, 624; Eadie, 350f] “The adjectival participle should simply be read as a substantive, ‘the thief,’ without reading into it progressive action (the kleptomaniac) or past action (the one who used to steal). Paul does not speak in a hypothetical way here. There were apparently many in the various communities of believers in western Asia Minor who continued to steal.” [Arnold, 303f] Some (e.g., Charles Hodge; 197) try to make Paul referring to those who stole in their past; the example given is someone who killed would be called ‘a murderer’ or someone in prison would be called ‘a thief’ although they were not actively stealing. This is plausible but does not explain why Paul makes a present-tense command to ‘no longer steal.’ More likely that as in the Corinthian church fornication and incest was tolerated (1 Cor 5:1-7), possibly in the culture of Ephesus theft may have been disregarded within the church or at least not visited with discipline.

A PICTURE OF THE TIMES PAUL LIVED IN — While this command would apply to all, the reference here would probably be the day-laborers. It is not that slaves were not capable of stealing, see Phile vv. 18,19; also consider the opportunities of pilfering food and goods which they may not have considered as theft. When Paul wrote to Titus he also admonished slaves to not pilfer but be faithful to their masters (Titus 2:10). But Paul goes on to say the repentant thief should now provide for the common good and a slave would normally not be in a position to devote their labor to earning money to contribute to the churches. But the common laborer with skills in a trade or a shopkeeper could easily mix stealing with their normal occupation. “There were many day labourers in the ancient world who could not depend on regular employment. The work of skilled tradesmen might also have been irregular. There were no funds outside Rome itself to assist the unemployed. The financially impoverished unemployed may have been forced into occasional stealing to maintain themselves and their families.” [Best, 453] “When a laborer was out of work there was no welfare system to help him or her nor would most have had enough wages to be able to save for times of unemployment. At such times many were forced to steal to maintain themselves and their families. Therefore, the injunction against theft struck at a real problem of that day.... However, Paul insisted that the one who is characterized by stealing must steal no longer because the person has put off the old person and its conduct and put on the new person and with its lifestyle.” [Hoehner, 624f] “His hands had done what was evil, and now these same were to be employed in what was good. If a man have no industrious calling, if he cannot dig, and if to beg he is ashamed, his resort is to plunder for self-support:

*‘Now goes the nightly thief, prowling abroad
For plunder; much solicitous how best
He may compensate for a day of sloth
By works of darkness and nocturnal wrong.’”* [Eadie, 352]

THEFT RECOGNIZED EARLY IN JUDAISM AS SIN — Theft was recognized as a major sin in Judaism from the time of the Decalogue (Ex 20:15; Deut 5:19; see also Isa 1:23; Jer 7:9; Lev 19:11) and repeated in the New Testament (Mark 10:19; Rom 13:9). It is condemned in several vice lists of the New Testament (Rom 2:21; 1 Cor 6:10; 1 Pet 4:15). The thief is included in the list of those who will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 5:10). “Just as Satan is a liar and a murderer, he is also a thief. ‘The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy’ (John 10:10). He turned Judas into a thief (John 12:6), and he would do the same to us if he could. When he tempted Eve, he led her to become a thief, for she took the fruit that was forbidden. And she, in turn, made Adam a thief. The first Adam was a thief and was cast out of Paradise, but the Last Adam, Christ, turned to a thief and said, ‘Today shalt thou be with me in paradise’ (Luke 23:43).” [Wiersbe, 41]

AS WITH OTHER NEW TESTAMENT COMMANDS, THIS TRANSCENDS THE CIVIL LAWS — Paul is not here referring to only such thefts as the civil law punishes but all unjust acquisition. (Calvin) “This enlargement of the idea of theft, though it transcends the limits assigned the offence in human laws, does not go beyond the law of God. As the command, ‘*Thou shalt do no murder,*’ includes the prohibition of malice; so the command, ‘*Thou shalt not steal,*’ forbids every thing that doth or may unjustly hinder our neighbour’s wealth or outward estate. It is very certain that many things tolerated by the customs of men; many modes of getting the property of others into our own possession practised even by those professing to be Christians, are in the light of the divine law only different forms of theft, and will be revealed as such in the judgment of the last day. *The spirit of the apostle’s command no doubt includes all the forms of dishonesty.*” [Hodge, 197]

but rather let him labour, — μάλλον δὲ κοπιᾶτω [mallon de kopiatō] — **SHARP CONTRAST** — Paul makes a sharp contrast with the preceding negative; while he could have used a simple conjunction ‘*but*’, Paul adds another adverb for emphasis, ‘*but rather, but instead.*’

NOT JUST ‘WORK’ BUT ‘WORK HARD’ — “Paul goes beyond the straightforward command of the Decalogue to prescribe an alternative lifestyle. He wants them to work hard. The word he chooses for work carries with it the sense of laboring to the point of weariness or exhaustion. As F. Hauck notes, ‘In prose it is the proper word for physical tiredness induced by work, exertion or heat.’ The present imperative suggests that this should now become the regular practice of the one who was accustomed to stealing.” [Arnold, 304; see also O’Brien, 343] “In classical literature [kopiao] had the idea ‘to be tired, grow weary.’ Later, the same sense ‘to tire’ referred specifically to warfare but could also allude to great efforts or ‘to wear out in work.’ In the LXX it occurs fifty times and in the canonical books it appears thirty-six times where it translates fourteen Hebrew words with sixteen occurrences for [the Hebrew word] meaning ‘to grow or be weary’ (Deut 25:18; Isa 40:28, 30, 31), ‘to toil, labor’ (Josh 24:13; Isa 49:4; 65:23), or ‘to be/grow weary’ from toil or exertion (2 Sam 23:10; Pss 6:6 [MT & LXX 6:7]; 69:3 [MT 69:4; LXX 68:4]; Isa 57:10). In the NT there are twenty-three instances of this word, fourteen times in Paul, and only here in Ephesians. Again it is used of being tired from a journey (John 4:6) or of endurance without weariness (Rev 2:3). Further, it is used of hard work, toil, physical struggle (Matt 6:28; Luke 5:5; Rom 16:6, 12; 2 Tim 2:6) and spiritual exertion (John 4:38; Gal 4:11; Phil 2:16; Col 1:29; 1 Tim 4:10; 5:17). *The point is that the labor exerted is exhausting. In this context the stealer used to obtain things with little effort, but with the acquisition of the new person all things are acquired with labor that requires much effort.*” [Hoehner, 625]

WORK VALUED, IDLENESS DENOUNCED — Work is not a result of the fall of man; it has often been noted God assigned Adam work prior to the fall (Gen 2:15). Work was highly regarded not just among Judaism (Exod. 20:9; Ps. 104:23; Prov. 6:6; 28:19) but in the Greco-Roman world as well. Rabbi Judah (c. 150 AD) said ‘*He who does not teach his son a craft teaches him to be a robber.*’ Phocylides (Greek poet, c. 560 BC) is quoted as having said, ‘*Work hard so that you can live from your own means; for every idle man lives from what his hands can steal.*’ “*Those who have been stealing are bidden to work. Jews valued work highly as a normal human activity (Exod 20.9; Ps 104.23; Prov 6.6; 28.19); the idle rich were denounced (cf Amos 6.4-6). Jesus had a trade and teachers of the Law were generally expected to support themselves. Work was also highly valued in the Greco-Roman world though there in contrast to Judaism manual labour was often, but not invariably, regarded as inferior to mental work.*” [Best, 453] “*It had been Paul’s policy to support his missionary activity by his work as an artisan, making tents from leather, and he exhorted his congregations also to work with their hands.*” [Lincoln, 303] “*The men that God called in the Scriptures were busy working when their call came. Moses was caring for sheep; Gideon was threshing wheat; David was minding his father’s flock; and the first four disciples were either casting nets or mending them. Jesus Himself was a carpenter.*” [Wiersbe, 42] “*It is God’s plan for everyone to work who is able to do so.*” [MacArthur, 186]

‘But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone’s bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.’ (2 Thess 3:6-12 NKJV)

‘But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you.’ (1 Thess 4:10,12 NKJV)

‘But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.’ (1 Tim 5:8 NKJV)

‘I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”’ (Acts 20:33-35 NKJV)

‘And we labor, working with our own hands’ (1 Cor 4:12a NKJV)

working the thing that is good with the hands, — ἐργαζόμενος τὸ ἀγαθὸν ταῖς χερσὶν [ergazomenos to agathon tais chersin]

— Paul does not here suggest only manual labor is recommended; rather *‘working with one’s hands’* is emphasizing hard work for gain as opposed to what was obtained by theft. Instead of using their hands to steal, believers are to put them to good use through hard work. [O’Brien, 343] “This does not necessarily imply that only manual work is valid, but Paul is using this expression as the normal portrayal of hard work for gain as opposed to gaining by stealing. It parallels with the idea that the robber uses his hands to gain something that is not rightfully his and now is to use his hands to obtain honest gain.” [Hoehner, 626]

‘THAT WHICH IS GOOD’ — *‘The good,’* that which is morally worthy and beneficial to others. “The purpose participle introduces the initial intent of the work, which is to produce ‘good things.’ This probably does not mean that they make good products (that people in the community can use), but rather that *they are ‘doing something good,’ that is, that they are engaged in meaningful labor.* This corresponds, in part, with the fact that Christians are called to do good works (2:10; see also Gal 6:10).” [Best, 454] **“Our labor should be in what is good, in work that is honest, honorable, and productive. The term agathos (good) connotes that which is good in quality, and here refers to God-honoring employment. A Christian should never be involved in a job, profession, work, or business that demands compromise of God’s standards, that dishonors Him, violates His holy commands, or misleads or harms others in any way.”** [MacArthur, 186]

that he may have to impart to him having need. — ἵνα ἔχη μεταδιδόναι τῷ χρεῖαν ἔχοντι [hina echē metadidonai tō chreian echonti]

PAUL’S REASON IS AGAIN DIRECTED TOWARDS THE GOOD OF OTHER BELIEVERS WITHIN THEIR CHURCHES — This is introduced by a *‘hina’* purpose clause: *‘the believer is to work hard with his hands in order that he may have something to share with others in need.’* There are many things Paul could have said: stealing is sin; stealing is an affront against the Lord; stealing is following Satan; etc. But Paul does not mention these things here. Nor does Paul give the reason for hard work as a means of comfort or for self, *‘let him work so he may take care of himself and not be tempted to steal.’* Even honest labor can become a selfish thing; the believer is to be both self-supporting and supportive of those in need. **“The motive for work is not individual profit but rather communal well-being.”** [Lincoln, 304] Obviously part of the reason for our hard labor is to provide food and shelter for oneself and one’s family (1 Tim 5:8, quoted above) but that is not the primary purpose as given by Paul in this verse. But Paul again directs the motive for not stealing towards the good of others within our churches. **“The ultimate purpose of such labor is that people have something to share with other believers who have real and legitimate needs. With this, Paul takes us back to the practice of the earliest church in Jerusalem, when believers voluntarily brought money and material goods to the apostles so they could distribute it to each person who had a need (Acts 4:35; see also 20:34 - 35). Such selfless giving and care in the life of the community is what the Lord pointed to when he said, ‘By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another’ (John 13:35 ESV). Calvin comments on the importance of this tangible manifestation of love in the community: ‘No one may live to himself alone, and neglect others. All must devote themselves to supplying other’s necessities.’”** [Arnold, 304] “This is not to suggest that believers should not help the needy among non-Christians. Elsewhere Paul urges his readers to *‘do good to all people.’* But they do have a special responsibility to *‘those of the household of faith’* (Gal. 6:10), and in the context of Eph. 4:25 the neighbour to whom one has a particular commitment is the fellow-believer.” [O’Brien, 344; see also Hoehner, 627]

‘SHARING’ BALANCES HOARDING AND RECKLESSLY GIVING IT ALL AWAY — “The infinitive ... means *‘to give part of, to give a share,’* as Greek cities shared in the use of a temple or shared in the benefits of the constitution. It can also mean *‘to communicate,’* which is the sharing of information. This word is used seven times in the LXX (only twice in the canonical books) meaning *‘to impart’* (Job 31:17; Prov 11:26; Wis 7:13; 2 Macc 1:35; Bar 6:27) or *‘to communicate’* (Tob 7:10; 2 Macc 8:12). In the NT the word appears five times, four times in Paul, only here in Ephesians. It can be used of sharing spiritual things, as when Paul shared a spiritual gift to strengthen the Romans (Rom 1:11) or of sharing the gospel (1 Thess 2:8). Also, it can be used of sharing material goods. For example, a person with two coats is to share with one who has no coat (Luke 3:11; cf. also Rom 12:8). **In the present context Paul is talking about sharing materially the good that has been gained with hard labor. He uses this term instead of [didomi], ‘to give,’ in order to avoid the idea that all that is earned must be given to others, but rather some earned good must be shared with others. This is a mean between two extremes. One is neither to hoard nor recklessly give all away.”** [Hoehner, 626f]

TO HIM IN NEED — **“The noun [chreia] has the sense of need, necessity, lack, want.** It occurs fifty-four times in the LXX but only nine times in the canonical books. For example, it refers to the need of timber from Lebanon for the temple (2 Chr 2:16 [MT & LXX 2:15]), to Artaxerxes who supplied Ezra with what was lacking for the temple (Ezra 7:20), to a fool who has no need of wisdom (Prov 18:2), to the Medes who lacked no gold (Isa 13:17), and to Jeconiah and Moab who were viewed as discarded broken vessels, which no one needed or wanted (Jer 22:28; 48:38 [LXX 31:38]). In the NT it occurs forty-nine times, fourteen times in Paul, including here and the next verse. It is used of the disciples who are enjoined to pray to the Father for their needs (Matt 6:8), of the sick who need a physician (Matt 9:12 = Mark 2:17 = Luke 5:31), of David’s need when he was hungry (Mark 2:25), and of the distribution of goods for those who lacked or had needs (Acts 2:45; 4:35). **Hence, working with his own hands, the believer is to share beneficial material goods with ones who have needs.”** [Hoehner, 627]

CONCLUSION: PAUL’S ADMONITION AGAIN EMPHASIZES THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE OLD LIFE AND THE NEW — **“When this ethical sentence is taken as a whole, it illustrates beautifully the radical change involved in the call to put off the old humanity and put on the new. The thief is to become a philanthropist, as the illegal taking of the old way of life is replaced by the generous giving of the new.”** [Lincoln, 304] **“The person who did wrong in order to meet his own selfish desires must now work in order to contribute to someone else’s need. This is a compelling example of dying and**

rising with Christ.” [Snodgrass, 250] “In conclusion, then, the stealer can no longer steal because he has put on the new person. The stealing must cease and diligent work must ensue in order to share with those in the community of believers who have real needs. The robber had taken with his hands what was not earned or rightfully his to the detriment of the one from whom he stole to use for his self-indulgence. Conversely, a believer is to work diligently with his or her hands to gain what is good for the purpose of sharing with those who have need. Work then has many benefits: it provides for a person’s material needs, it provides something useful to do (something that is beneficial to oneself and others), and enables one to materially help others who are in need. If the scenario of laborers out of work were forced to steal is correct, then those within the believing community would need to trust the Lord to provide through the community of believers who were to share their material goods.” [Hoehner, 627f]