

## **Ephesians 4:28 Don't Steal**

**28 The one who steals must no longer steal; but rather he must labor, producing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with the one who has need.**

**Let the stealer no longer steal.**

To whom is Paul referring? Well likely he's talking about the kinds of things that people are more apt to rationalize to themselves. Don't worry so much about whether your company is treating you fairly, it can't justify your actions in cheating them. Don't worry about if your suppliers or vendors are raising costs unnecessarily, don't cheat the customers. Bad behavior done to us does not justify our sinning against them in return. We should not take our own revenge, but let God judge and pay back. As Jesus said in Matthew 7:1-5 **"Do not judge, so that you will not be judged. 2 For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. 3 Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and look, the log is in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye!** Whether it's specks and logs or loaves and butter, or car parts for that matter, it's best that we treat people fairly, even if we don't think we're being treated fairly. We tend to magnify other people's sins against us, and minimize our sins against other people. In Ephesus many lived by stealing. In Homer's time, 850 B.C, they noted that their myths included the heroes and gods stealing. The old Spartans taught their boys to steal; the disgrace was in being caught. In many places now, thieving is common. It's wrong when we spend all day talking and messing around, or daydreaming, or scrolling through the internet, instead of working. It's wrong when someone drinks or stays up all night, and is so tired or hung-over that they can't work, and just muddle through the day. Paul's Christian teaching will push all that out. "Let the stealer steal no more." And this considering that Paul's day, when a laborer was out of work there was no welfare system to help him or her, nor would most people have had enough wages to be able to save up for times of unemployment. They were therefore forced to steal to keep themselves and their families alive. So, this injunction against theft highlighted an important problem of their day. So is Paul just saying go ahead and starve, you and your family, if you're out of work? No, he is saying, work for your food, don't steal it, but rather labor for it. God will provide a way if you're willing.

Stealing takes all kinds of forms: **Stealing Property**—theft, cheating in measures, weights, etc. Unjust lawsuits, corporate theft, unjust taxes. **Robbers of people's good name**—slanderers and gossips, false witnesses. **Robbers of God's Glory**—minimizers of God's work, people who refuse to give God the credit for what He does; especially those who try to take the credit themselves.

**We ought to learn to call things by their right names.**

If a homeless person, half-starved in the streets is shivering on a cold day, and slyly takes a coat or sleeping bag that has been laid carelessly aside, or unwatched on a rack, then everyone would call them a thief, although a few would have mercy on him regarding his need, it would be considered just that he pay for his crime. But consider those wealthy, and politicians who steal not dollars, but trillions of dollars that is being found as a search is being conducted for waste, fraud and abuse in government. Why don't we call it what it is?! **THEFT** from the American People to line the pockets of people who are already wealthy! We hide it under these other names, but it is theft and grand larceny.

**but rather let him labor.**

Paul says don't steal, but rather, or instead, labor—work. It literally means "to wear out in work." He's saying that it may be more work to earn your own food, but it is the right thing to do. Paul said in 2 Thess 3:10-11 **10 For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. 11 For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies.** As the old saying goes, idle hands are the devil's plaything. People then, and people now get themselves into trouble when they have all

sorts of free time on their hands. So, does Paul expect them to starve while they're still looking for work, and haven't found a job yet? No. For those willing to work, who are just out of a job, then Christian brothers and sisters are supposed to do what they can to help those brothers and sisters in need. This is the role of the church. Charity comes from the word for love, and it's the function of the church, not the government.

**working with his own hands that which is good.** Paul uses this idea of working with one's own hands as the correct conduct for believers, Consider his personal example. He had been an up and coming member or assistant to the members of the Sanhedrin, sent out by the high priest himself on missions for the cause of Judaism. He was obviously politically connected, and likely very wealthy. And yet, when he came to Christ, he discarded all of that as rubbish. He describes his current state of affairs in 1 Cor 4:11-13 **11 Up to this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed and roughly treated and homeless; 12 and we labor, working with our own hands; when we are verbally abused, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; 13 when we are slandered, we reply as friends; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now.** But did he look at his current circumstances, and long for his former social acceptance and wealth? No. He said in Phil 3:7-9 **7 But whatever things were gain to me, these things I have counted as loss because of Christ. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them mere rubbish, so that I may gain Christ,** He had his priorities straight. And he advised others on the goodness of work, and especially working with your hands, saying in 1 Thess 4:11-12 **11 and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we instructed you, 12 so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.**

#### **the good**

Beneficial good. The robber had used his hands to work injury to others but now he is to work that which is good. Earlier Paul stated that we, as believers are God's workmanship, having been created for good works (in Ephesians 2:10), and that includes the work that we do to make a living by doing good things, that also allows us to earn a living.

**The purpose of work:**—The idle members of a community are its greatest curses. It is wrong idea that work is wholly a curse, to be escaped if possible. God cursed the ground so that we would have to work by the sweat of our brow FOR OUR SAKE—so that we wouldn't have so much idle time, now that sin was in the world. We are to work to produce something beneficial to mankind. And God gets to work with us to choose the kind of work that we do, sanctifying it. A sanctified plumber can work in muck with holiness! Whatever our work may be, whether we be servants or masters, God is our Employer. He has appointed our work.

Paul encourages believers to roll up their sleeves, as it were, and get busy with manual labor (1 Thess 4:11–12; 2 Thess 3:6–13). He qualifies the work as “useful,” using the same Greek term that describes those “good” works that God prepared in advance for believers to walk in (Eph 2:10).

**in order that he might share with the one who has need.** The purpose for work is not self-indulgence but to benefit those who are in need. 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). Paul is talking here about sharing materially the good that has been gained with those in need, necessity, lack, want, primarily those who are believers. It does not mean that Christians are never to help the needy who may not be believers but our primary responsibility is to Christians around us. This will demonstrate a love for one another and the world will know that they are his disciples (John 13:35).