

Who You Are Determines How You Live: Do Not Steal

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Preacher: Mike Salvati

[0:00] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. What an honor. What an honor.

Good to see you guys. Sometimes when preparing a sermon, you can feel like a piece of meat getting tenderized by God's holy meat mallet.

Well, this week was a convicting week. We're looking at a passage this morning on stealing. And you know what?

[1:42] When a preacher is studying and preparing, not only are they seeking to understand a passage, they're seeking to come under the passage. And it's good and right for a preacher to be convicted in order to deal faithfully with his own sin before he proclaims it to others.

So this past Friday, I called my mom. And I confessed to her that when I was in high school, I would steal money from her purse.

I would say, hey mom, can I have a couple bucks to go out with my friends? She said, sure. Take 10 bucks. When I was in her purse, I'd take 12 or 13.

It wasn't my money to take. I wronged my mom. And looking back, I was just adding it up to this week. I think I was like breaking five of the Ten Commandments every time I would do that.

Well, my mom graciously forgave me. But I could tell there was some sting. She graciously forgave me. Now, I'm so grateful for my mom. This morning, we're going to be concentrating on just one verse from our Bibles.

[2:54] Ephesians chapter 4, verse 28. And before we get there, let me just remind you a little bit of the immediate context leading up to this verse.

Chapter 4 starts in talking about the church, the body of Christ, all those who put their faith in Christ alone for the forgiveness of their sins and the promise of eternal life.

And for those of us in the room who are believers in Jesus, we're the church, the body of Jesus.

And in chapter 4, verse 17, Paul turns a corner and he reminds us that we are to no longer live like we used to be.

That was the former manner of our lives. That was our old way of living before we became Christians. And now, we live as followers of Jesus.

Those made new. And so, in Ephesians 4, 17 through 24, Paul helps us to remember to put off the old self in all of its ways. To renew our minds of who we are in Christ.

[4:01] And then to put on Christ likeness. That which is righteous and holy in God's image.

So, Paul, after 17 through 24, he then turns to specific issues. He takes this kind of principle of put off, renew, put on, and then applies it to particular issues.

And so, verse 25, he says, put away falsehood and put on speaking the truth to our neighbor. 26 and 27, he says, put off sinful anger, be slow to anger, and when you get angry, make sure you're getting angry at the right things in the right way.

And then in verse 28, Paul turns his attention to talking about stealing. So, let me read for you. 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.

[5:15] Because of who we are in Christ, we are new creations in Jesus. We are to no longer be greedy takers, using our hands to steal things.

Rather, we are to be hardworking, honest helpers. People who give things with their hands. We no longer take.

We give. Jesus has changed us. I've been trying to tell you for the last few weeks, who you are determines how you live.

If you're a Christian, it changes the way how you live, because you're a different person now, because of what God and Christ has done in you. And this morning, what we're going to be looking at is, who you are determines how you work, how you use your hands.

And so, from verse 28, I'm going to draw four things out for you. First is this. We need an ID check. Second, the command to stop stealing.

[6:22] Third, the command to do honest work, to go legit. And then fourth, to start sharing, to use our hands to help others.

Now, we're all doing this. We're looking at this because God has changed us. We're new creatures in Christ. And now, we use our hands not to take, but to give.

So, let's first look at this ID check. Now, theoretically speaking, if you were pulled over by a police officer, theoretically speaking, they would probably say something like this.

Now, this is just theory. I'm not saying I personally have witnessed this myself, but I've seen it on TV, and it must be true. They come up to your window and say, sir, may I see your license and registration, please?

Well, of course, a registration has to do with your car, whether or not it's legitimate, should be on the road. The license, your driver's license, is the police officer asking to see your identity, to say, who are you?

[7:37] It's to see if you're legit. And so, on your driver's license, there's some really important information. There's your picture, right? And then there's your name. And then there's your height.

And then your weight. And then your eye color. And your hair color. Your birth date. Your social security number. Your address. These are vitals. These are really important information.

It's not all of who you are on the little card, but it's kind of like really important stuff of who you are on the little card. It's essentially an ID card. It says who you are.

Now, here's the deal. As Christians, we tend to forget who we are. We tend to forget that the triune God of the universe, in an amazing act of grace, made us alive with Christ.

We tend to forget that. We were dead, and now we are alive. We are under God's wrath. Now we are His workmanship. We were once damned, and now we are God's delight.

[8:42] We tend to forget that. One of the things that, if you haven't figured this out yet, part of walking with Jesus, following Jesus, is remembering who you are.

That's where a lot of it starts. Renewing your mind on the truth of what God's Word says to be true of you. That you are blood-bought by Jesus. That you belong to God.

You are mine. You are alive. And you are holy. So here's what I'd like to help you to do. Because we tend to forget our ID. We need to pull out our Gospel ID card.

Can I help you with this? It's just a little card filled with very important words about who you are. These are biblical words. And so first is your name, Mike Salvati, child of God.

Your name, child of God. And then next you see this thing called the Trinity plan. What do you say is that? Well, Ephesians 1, 3-14 says this. Before the foundation of the world, God chose you.

[9:47] The Father chose you. He predestined you to be adopted as His son or His daughter. That's who you are. And then it goes on to say in verse 7, you've been redeemed by the blood of Jesus in the present.

And then it goes on to say that you've been sealed by the Spirit of God Himself for eternity future. And so according to the Trinity plan, you're signed, sealed, and delivered. From eternity past to eternity future, God has sought you and called you to Himself.

You belong to Him. So that's the Trinity plan. And then there's this thing called the NCD. The new creation date.

The moment in time you became a new creation. When you were born again. When you were made alive. And for some of the people in this room, you know not only the year, but the month, the day,

the hour, the minute, the very second you became a Christian.

It stands out like that. You're like, oh yeah, I know where I was standing the moment I became a Christian. For others of us, it's not as focused.

[11:00] Like me, I think it's kind of like a two-year window, to be honest with you. Like, alright, before 1980, I was kind of a jerk. And then at 1982, I actually started to sing to God. Something happened in there.

I was made alive. I love my Savior on this side. I didn't before that. Your new creation date. When did you become a Christian?

Do you remember when you were dead, but then made alive? Do you remember that? It's who you are. And then there's this other thing called the BP.

Body part. Some of us are feet. Some of us are shins. Some of us are shoulders, pinkies, and thumbs. God has knit us together as a body.

The body of Christ. It's part of who you are. You belong to something bigger than yourself. You're part of Christ's body. This is who you are.

[12:02] This is on the gospel ID card, and it's printed in Bible. Do you get what I'm saying? And so what you want to do is you want to tuck that gospel ID card into your heart, and then you want to pull it out every once in a while.

You got to remind yourself of who you are. This past week, I was up in the middle of the night, freaking out, and I had finally got to a point where it's like, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. I'm a new creation.

I don't need to be stressed out about this. God has changed me. I'm his. Here was a sweet moment. What I'm trying to tell you here is you have a new identity in Christ.

You've got to remember who you are. You've got to renew your minds with God's word. What does God say about you, brother? What does God say about you, sister?

And so now what we do is now we drill down into Ephesians 4.28. Having reminded us of who we are in Christ, we're new creations, now let's look at the command.

[13:07] Because we don't obey the command to become new creations, we're new creations who can now obey the command. That's what God has done. So we've looked at the ID check.

Now let's look at the command. And stop stealing. Let the thief no longer steal. Let the thief no longer steal.

What is stealing? Stealing is taking something that belongs to someone else. Stealing is taking something that doesn't belong to you and you're taking it for yourself.

That's what stealing is. Taking something that doesn't belong to you. And we all know that there's a variety of ways to steal. And so I've tried in my limited imagination to write some down.

To help us think in terms of what does it mean to steal? What is God calling us to stop? Stealing is when you take something that belongs to someone else.

[14:15] If you take pens from your employer without their permission, you are stealing. Now you might respond by saying something like this. Well, the pen's only 75 cents, cell body.

It doesn't matter how much it is. The issue isn't value. The issue is property. Who it belongs to. And so if it's a 75 cent pen or a 75 dollar pen. If it belongs to your employer, it belongs to your employer. The issue is who does this belong to?

And so if we take something that's not ours, we're stealing it. So what happens if you have someone, your employer's pen, just bring it back. If you take grapes while at Woodman's and you clip off a little whatever it's called and you're eating them as you're shopping, you are stealing.

Those grapes don't belong to you. Now you might be saying, well, they're just like a cent each. Come on. It doesn't matter how much value they are.

[15:31] It's who they belong to. And if you have not purchased them yet, they do not belong to you. And unless something is labeled clearly sample, you got to pay for it.

We can't be stealing grapes. Now, if you acquire music, videos, software, and you haven't paid for it, you may have stolen it.

You may have stolen it. The people that own the rights to these things, whether music or video or software, they are the ones that determine whether or not something is free or something can be charged.

We don't determine that. Those people who have the right of possession, they determine that. And so we've got to be asking the question when we're looking at music or videos or software, who owns this?

And have they given the right for me to take this to myself for free? Or do I need to make a purchase? So the issue here isn't whether something is really easy to acquire.

[16:43] That's not the issue. The issue is, who does it belong to? That's the question we've got to be asking. Who does it belong to? Taxes.

Now, you may be thinking, yes, finally. Salvati, bring the heat. Our government's stealing our money. Bring it, baby.

Come on. Well, not so fast. Do you remember when Jesus was asked a particular question in Mark 12?

Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Do you remember that? Jesus is just so brilliant. I would have loved to have been there.

I love my Bible, but I would have loved to have been there too. Well, Jesus says, someone hold up a denarius. And a denarius was a nice coin. And on that denarius was an inscription.

[17:38] And Jesus says, whose picture is on the denarius? And everybody said, Caesar's. And then Jesus said, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's.

And to God the things that are God's. You know what Jesus is saying? Pay your taxes. That's what Jesus is saying. Pay your taxes.

Romans 13. Paul is teaching these Christians in Rome that the government has been given for the common good of people. It's God's ministering agents.

Some really interesting language in Romans 13. And Paul is telling them this because he wants to help them to see why they are to pay their taxes. And so in verses 6 and 7 we read, Paul says, Pay to all what is owed them.

Taxes to whom taxes are owed. Revenue to whom revenue is owed. Now if you're not paying your taxes, if you're avoiding paying your taxes, what that means is you're actually stealing from the government.

[18:51] It's theirs. We are to pay that as citizens. Now if you don't like the tax rate, we use the political system in the legislature in order to change these things.

We don't make those decisions on our own. So we can't steal from the government. Now if you are a student, and you're sneaking peeks at your classmates' quizzes and tests in order to get the right answers, in order to get good grades, you're actually stealing.

You're probably being deceitful too. But you're stealing. Those answers do not belong to you. They belong to your classmates. You're claiming something that's not yours.

Now even if your classmate was a willing partner, like sure, here, have my answers. It's still stealing. Because unless your teacher has said otherwise, you are personally responsible for your own work that you do in your classroom.

You can't steal somebody else's work. Do you know what plagiarism is? Has anybody heard that word before? Or plagiarism is stealing the academic work of someone else.

[20:16] We're not to do that. It's not who we are. Now, I've left the kind of big one for last. Is it possible to steal from God?

The answer is yes. It's not like God needs money. He's loaded. He's got everything. All of it's His anyways. But in Malachi 3, God rebukes His people for greedily keeping back the tithe.

They weren't giving the 10% that God called them to. And so in Malachi 3.8, we read this. God says this to His people. You are robbing me.

How would you like to hear that from God? You are robbing me. Now, in the New Testament, the emphasis moves from an amount to an attitude when it comes to giving.

In 2 Corinthians 9, we read that God delights in a cheerful giver. And that as Christians, we're to give proportionally. We're to give willingly. Not because we have to.

[21:26] But because we want to. And we are to give generously. And Paul grounds that in Jesus Himself. He was rich.

And for our sake became poor. And through His poverty, we became rich. Not with jingle. With salvation. We've been blessed.

He's lavished us with His grace. And so what we see in the New Testament is a principle that goes like this. He who sows sparingly, reaps sparingly.

And he who sows bountifully, reaps bountifully. God is very concerned about our attitudes. And yes, we can still rob God now. But here's what God says back in Malachi 3.10.

God says this to His people. So, put me to the test. Try me. Be generous. I'll take care of you.

[22:26] I'll take care of you. I love it. These are just examples of ways we can steal. Steal is taking something that belongs to someone else.

And the command is clear here. We are to stop that. We are not to do that. Because it's not who we are. Christ has changed us.

We're no longer thieves. Furthermore, it's not loving your neighbor as yourself. Now, the question is, what if you've stolen something?

What do you do? You fess up. Let me give you an example from my own life. A couple years ago, I was making my way through the Ten Commandments.

And I saw do not steal coming. And my mind went immediately to my sock drawer. Because in my sock drawer was a pair of socks that were 15 years old.

[23:33] I had taken them from a relative when I was driving through town. I didn't ask this relative if I could have his socks. I just took them. Because I needed them.

But I didn't tell him. And so for 15 years, these socks stayed in my sock drawer. And I would look at them every time and say, You're a thief, Salvati.

You're a thief. And you know what I finally did? I finally called them. I'm like, 15 years ago, I was driving through and I took these socks from your drawer. I am so sorry. And he laughed.

He thought it was hilarious. And so the next day, I mailed him two new pairs of the finest, nicest socks I could possibly find. And sent them to him.

Eventually, we got a pretty good laugh out of it. But you know what else I got out of it? A clear conscience. It's very valuable.

[24:34] So if you've been stealing, confess it. Get right with it. Don't spin it. Be real about it.

Speak the truth about it. Stealing is simply not who we are anymore. It's not our color, so to speak. We're no longer to be greedy takers.

But we're to be honest givers. And so now we turn to the third point. We're to do honest work. We're to do honest work.

We're to go legit. Listen from Ephesians 4.28. But rather, let him labor doing honest work with his own hands.

What does our work look like now? Well, we are to be hard workers. We're to work hard. Those little words, let him labor. They actually carry the sense that we're to wear ourselves out with our work.

[25:39] We're to get tired working. Which means this. Hard work is a good thing. Getting tired is a good thing. It's okay to go home tired from the long days of work.

It's good. In fact, if we're reading this right, it's actually godly. To be a hard worker. Jesus knew hard work himself. He was a carpenter.

And then the three years of itinerant ministry he did, that would have been extremely difficult work. It would have been hard on his body. He was a hard worker. Not only are we to be hard worker, but we're to work with our own hands.

We're to take responsibility for the work entrusted to us. We're not to shirk it off of somebody else. We're to say, I'm responsible for this. I'll take the heat.

This is my work. I'm responsible. But Paul is also talking about something here that's a little bit bigger scale when he talks about working with our own hands.

[26:43] He's saying take personal responsibility for your life. We're to provide for ourselves. As we are able, we are to keep ourselves from becoming an unnecessary burden to others.

Now, Paul modeled this himself. I'm not sure if you guys knew this, but Paul had a little side business. Tents by Paul. He was a tent maker.

And so different seasons, he would make tents so that he wouldn't be an unnecessary burden on the churches. Paul wanted to take responsibility with his own hands to provide for himself when it was right.

If you're taking notes, I want you to write something down. It's 2 Thessalonians 3, verses 6-12. It is a very strong warning from the Apostle Paul to those who are idle, to those who aren't working. It's very strong. We've got to heed it. As Christians, God wants us to work in a way to provide for ourselves, to take personal responsibility for ourselves, to use our hands in a way that is marked by responsibility, not irresponsibility.

[28:05] The last thing I want you to see is that this work is to be honest work. Honest work. Literally, good work.

We were created in Christ Jesus for good works. And what he's talking about here is, yes, the nature of our work.

It matters to God what we do. We're not to be involved in illegitimate business practices. It's not us. We're to be doing things that are legitimate, honest, good, right.

We're to be working with our hands at things that are beneficial to others. To be doing work in this city, not for the bad of this city, but for the good of this city.

We're not to delight in evil. We're to delight in doing good. That's the kind of work we should be doing. And this work that we are to do is to have a certain kind of quality to it.

[29:11] Not only is it good and right and beneficial, we're to do our work well. To do it well. We are to do good to others by doing good work.

So if you are watching children, do it with all your heart. If you are a student, with all your heart. Teachers, with everything you've got.

If you're driving a truck, do it with everything you've got, but mind the speed limit. If you are managing projects, with all your heart unto Jesus.

If you're writing sermons, give it everything you've got. If you're serving tables, in manufacturing service, IT, whatever you put your hand to, as unto the Lord.

It's going to show up in the quality of our work. Do you know who the best worker should be in Kenosha? Those who call Jesus their Lord. We work for Him.

[30:12] I hope you see what's going on here in Ephesians 4.28. It's a little snapshot of transformation. Someone who's being dramatically changed from being a thief who takes to being a worker who gives.

Their heart's changed. They're no longer greedy. They're lovers of people. They want to help. Which brings us to my last point. We are to share.

We're to share with others in need from the fruit of our labor. But rather, let Him labor doing honest work with His own hands so that He may have something to share with anyone in need.

that He may have something to share with anyone in need. We once used our hands for personal gain through illegitimate means.

Now, because Jesus has changed our hearts, we use our hands to do legitimate work in order to share with others in need. The gospel has changed us.

[31:19] Notice the reason why Paul tells us to work hard. At the core of it is we're different people now. But he gives another reason here. To help.

Help those in need. And what's implied there is we can see those in need. We're aware of those in need. We're positioned to help those people in need.

Now, when it comes to helping people in need, I think there can be a lot of confusion. There can be a lot of concerns kind of holding back. I don't know what to do. I don't want to hurt people with my helping them.

I want to really help people with my helping them. So let me just show you one thing from the text meant to help. And then I want to kind of flesh some of this stuff out. Back in Ephesians 4.28, I want you to see the word share.

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. That word share is a very important word.

[32:20] Paul is very purposed in using it. Here's what the two mistakes are in either side of this word. The first mistake is this. We don't help anybody in need.

That's mistake number one. We give nothing to those in need. That's mistake number one. Mistake number two is this. We give everything to those in need. That's mistake number two.

And so what we want to do is avoid the extremes. We want to avoid giving nothing, and we want to avoid giving everything. What Paul is saying here is we're to give some of the produce of our labor. We're to give some of the fruit of our work. Now, this may raise another question for you. Having defined that, okay, we've got to give more than nothing and less than everything.

So what does that mean? How do you decide? Well, the way I'm going to help you decide is not tell you what to do. I'm going to tell you how to think. Would you flip over to Galatians chapter six?

[33:24] It should be like two pages to your left. Galatians chapter six. I want to show you two words meant to help you know how to help somebody in need.

How to help you discern. How to discern. Galatians 6.2. Bear one another's burdens. You see that word burden? Now look down at verse four.

But let each one test his own work and then he has reason to boast with himself. Sorry, verse five. For each will have to bear his own load. Burden, load.

The word load was used of a Roman soldier's backpack. It was fitted for that one person to carry. It was the right weight.

And so as we're looking to help people in need, we don't want to pull off their backpacks. We want to give people dignity. We want to help them carry their own load.

[34:24] We want to help them do that. So that's one way we've got to discern these things. Here's the other way we've got to be aware of. The word burden. That word means beyond which someone is able to carry on their own.

And so as we are trying to help people, we simultaneously want to be able to say, hey, what can we help you carry? And then discern, okay, what is beyond what you're able to carry yourself?

We'll help bear your burden. And so when we come to helping people in need, we want to be asking questions, what's theirs to carry? And what's the burden? And let's help there.

And so what we'll do is help with what we're able to help at any given time. Is that making sense? There's a really helpful book. It's called, what is it?

Helping Without Hurting. Outstanding book. We're going to show a video series of that probably sometime in early 2015. We showed it over the summer. Very helpful way of thinking to helping people in need.

[35:26] Now, I just want to be clear. You can't miss what's going on here. Jesus changes us. He changes the way we use our hands.

We are no longer using our hands to take things for ourselves. Jesus has changed our hearts. Now we use our hands to work in order to help other people in need.

From greedy hands to giving hands. That's the mark of Jesus. Let me pray. Let me pray. God, would you make us hard workers, honest, helpful, Christ-like, holy in the way that we labor.

May we be others focused, helping people in need. And God, would you help make us wise as we seek to help people in need. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.