

A woman went to the primitive market to buy a chicken. The butcher reached into his barrel and pulled out **his last one**. He put it on the scale and said, "That will be 7 lbs." The lady replied, "Oh I will need more than that". The butcher, put the chicken back in the barrel swished around as if he was looking for another one and pulled the same one out. He put it on the scale and said, "Ok, this one is 10 pounds", to which the lady replied, "Oh, great. I will take both." Be sure your sin will find you out!

Ephesians 4:25-28

"Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. 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." (ESV)

Today I am continuing our series entitled Raised to Life based upon Ephesians 4:20-5:20. We began this series with the story of Lazarus who was raised to life when Jesus called him out of his tomb. Lazarus came out of his tomb fully alive but still wrapped in his grave clothes, in need of a new wardrobe. We saw how Lazarus serves as a good illustration of Christian conversion. Eph. 2 tells us that in saving us from our sins Jesus has done more than just forgive us. He has raised us from our state of spiritual death and has given us new life. In Ephesians 4:1 Paul wrote, "I... implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called". The Christians "walk" is a figure of speech for the Christian's way of life. Our walk consists in more than behavior. It refers to our affections, attitudes, and actions. In verse 17 Paul picked up that language again when he wrote, "...you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds". For those who are new to Christianity and the bible you are probably wondering what is a "Gentile." A "Gentile" is a non-Jew, but Paul was writing to a church comprised of Jews and Gentiles! In this case he was using "Gentile" to refer to those who did trust in and live according to God's revelation of Himself, but who worshipped idols and false gods...which are no gods at all!

Paul went on to employ the language of unclothing and clothing oneself when referring to the change that ought to take place in the life of the

person who is now “in Christ”. In Romans 13:14 Paul writes, “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” At the heart of all this instruction about “putting off” and “putting on” is a call to clothe ourselves with Christ. The reason we unclthe ourselves of certain affections, attitudes, and actions is only because they are contrary, or inconsistent, with the character and will of Christ. What we put on is consistent with the character and will of Christ. In two of Paul’s other letters, he wrote, “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord” (Col. 1:10) and “walk in a manner worthy of God” (1 Thess 2:12): In other words, live in a way that is worthy or appropriate for one who names Christ as His Lord and claims a relationship with Him.

In Ephesians 4:25 & 28 Paul writes that the one who has been raised to life by Christ ought to put off dishonesty. Lying, cheating and stealing are contrary to the character of Christ, harmful to the people of God as the dwelling place of God’s Spirit, and they undermine our witness for Christ before watching world. Therefore, they must be put off by God’s people.

We are called to “go” and make disciples. Jesus said, “let your light shine before men so that when they see your good works they will glorify God the Father.” The unbelieving world needs to not just hear us talk about being saved from sin, they need to see a church that has been saved from sin.

In the book, *The Day America Told the Truth*, by James Patterson & Peter Kim they recorded the following results from their research.

74% of people surveyed said, “I will steal from those who won't really miss it.”
91% admitted to lying regularly.
20% agreed with the statement, “I can’t make it through a day without lying.”
64% agreed with the statement, “I will lie when it suits me, so long as it doesn't cause any real damage.”

The Economic Policy Institute reported in 2014 that survey evidence suggests wage theft costs US workers billions of dollars a year. Then on the other hand research reveals a pervasive problem of employee theft as well.

- The FBI calls employee theft “the fastest-growing crime in America”

According to a CBSnews online article (July 2011):

- The U.S. Chamber of Commerce estimates that 75 percent of employees steal from the workplace and that most do it repeatedly
- One third of all U.S. corporate bankruptcies are directly caused by employee theft.

David Callahan, bestselling author of *The Cheating Culture* documents extensively the pervasiveness of cheating in every aspect of life; from the boardroom, to classroom, to locker room . There have been a host of articles, news reports and books written addressing an epidemic of cheating in our schools.

It's is pretty clear that honesty is not highly valued or widely practiced in our society. This means that in order for us to live lives of integrity and honesty we are going to have to swim upstream against the current. It means a radical transformation. And it is not enough to just say, "Don't Lie, Don't cheat". The transformation needs to take place at a deeper level.

My opening illustration reminds us that one reason to be honest is that dishonesty will usually come back to haunt you. The popular phrase, "Honesty is the best policy" conveys the truth that being honest is good for business. But this philosophy encourages honesty to be practiced out of self-interest. But what about those situations where dishonesty does serve our self-interest. Cheaters do prosper sometimes.

There are much better reasons for God's people to lay aside lying, cheating and stealing and to act with honesty and integrity than simply because it is ultimately in our own self-interest to do so. Our honesty and integrity should be the fruit, or by-product, of the character of Christ being formed in us by the Holy Spirit.

In order for this transformation to take place we need to dig deeper and go beneath the surface issues of lying, cheating and stealing. Because dishonesty has some root causes that must be addressed. In order to put off dishonesty we need to put off the undergarments that motivate it.

Why the "Old Man" Lies & Steals

1. To Hurt Others – Two weeks ago we spoke about slander which is often motivated by a malicious desire to hurt another person. The underlying cause is hatred, not love. Likewise, there are times people steal from others just to hurt them. TAKE OFF HATRED

2. To Protect Oneself – I think this is probably the #1 reason people lie. Peter's denial of Christ was motivated by a desire to protect himself. The underlying cause is fear which is due to a lack of trust in God. I have to provide for my own security. People often steal and cheat because they fear that God either won't or can't provide for them if they act honestly. TAKE OFF FEAR

3. To Elevate Oneself/ Gain Praise – Acts 5:1-4 Ananias sold some property and lied saying he was giving all the proceeds to the church. Peter rebuked him, not for keeping some of the money, but for lying and trying to make himself look more generous than he really was. The underlying cause was pride. People often steal due to pride as well. It is not necessarily the material thing they are after but the elevation of their status before men that they believe that possession will grant them. TAKE OFF PRIDE

4. To Get Stuff – Americans like stuff. Greed and covetousness are the two characteristics of our fallen, sinful nature that show up earliest in our lives. All you have to do is visit a toddler or preschool classroom. Little Johnny can be playing with a toy completely content...until Billy comes in and picks up another toy. All of a sudden Johnny is no longer content with what he has...he needs to possess what Billy has. God created people to be loved and things to be used. Sinful, broken people have turned things on their head, loving things and using people in order to get the things they love. TAKE OFF GREED

In place of these old grave clothes of greed, pride, fear, hatred we need to put on the following: 1. Love 3. Humility 4. Trust

Look at verse 28 again for a moment. Notice what the contrasting virtue is to the vice of theft; it is working.

Here we have some insight into the biblical understanding of "work". Work is something blessed by God, it is not a curse. God has created us to be creative

and productive: To contribute something to others. Work should not be viewed as a curse. Neither is work defined merely in terms of gainful employment. There are some unemployed people that work harder than many employed people. I am saying this because the world often deceives Christians who work as volunteers because they can't find employment or who chose to stay home and give themselves to the work of raising children and managing a home into thinking because they don't make money their work is insignificant.

We need to stop defining work in terms of receiving a paycheck. An enterprise can be profitable, but not productive. Some jobs for which people receive a paycheck are not constructive but destructive to society. Just when I thought I heard it all until I read that pornographers asked for a \$5 billion dollar gov't bailout in 2009.

When Paul contrasts those who steal with those who work we see that the contrast he is drawing is between TAKERS and GIVERS.

God's people who are being conformed to the character of Christ will find themselves being transformed from TAKERS to GIVERS.

What Paul is saying is this: "Stop stealing (stop being a TAKER) and start working so you have something to give (start being a GIVER). Jesus is the greatest giver: For god so loved the world that he GAVE.

Unwrapping, undressing ourselves from our former habits of thought and behavior, and clothing our minds and hearts with new habits of thought and behavior requires the work of the Holy Spirit. The new walk begins with a new heart (desires) and a new mind (attitudes) and these.

We can sum up a large portion of NT teaching in Romans and Galatians as follows. The law, specifically that part of the law that consists of moral instruction, is good and holy. However, it is also weak. It is good, but inadequate because moral principles and codes can only influence behavior, not the heart from which that behavior springs. The law can only manage sin. Jesus is the one who crushed sin in his death and resurrection. Now, those who are united with Christ by faith are the recipients of the Spirit of Christ,

the Holy Spirit. He has come to dwell in and among God's people, empowering and influencing us to live lives of integrity, honesty, and generosity, motivated by a heart of love, security, and humility. Ask the Holy Spirit to renew your mind and heart today!