
Why a Christian Goes to Work

Ephesians 4:28⁵

Russ Kennedy

Let me introduce you to some people:

Alan - married, hard worker, savings, big house, some giving

Joanna - single, no job, living with parents, depressed, big debt

James - married, drifts from job to job, barely supplies, wife ends up being primary breadwinner

Tina - in high school, doesn't complete assignments, borrows her classmates work, thinks education is a waste of time

Brice - married, decent job, works steady, spends every extra penny on his kid's sports

Of these, who is reflecting a Biblical understanding of work?

NONE: of them. Why? What's wrong with Alan and Brice?

The Scripture is deeply concerned about both what we do and why we do it. It has much to say about our motivations. The deep roots of what we actually believe and want produce the fruit of how we feel and act. This morning, we will be thinking together about one aspect of our work. I do not want you to hear this only in reference to the job where you get paid. There are lots of ways to apply our text this morning to your lives. I particularly want our young people to focus in and listen carefully.

Underlying Principles

(v. 20-24)

Let us begin with what is in the background. There is an underlying set of principles that our text is based on. Paul calls these, "The truth that is in Jesus ..."

²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ!— ²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Because of what God has done (put off the old person) and who we have become (the new man in God's holy image) then, you must intentionally work at putting off unbelieving, old man stuff and putting on holy, new man stuff. Every one of these reflects this Biblical reality and personal responsibility. All of these are connected to relation-

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ships. Each one will have something to stop, put off and something to begin, put on. Each one will have a reason; a Biblical truth to be believed from which this obedience rises.

The Old Person Put Off

(v. 22)

We have definitively put off the old person we used to be.

Notice its *place*. It belongs to the former way of life. This is our life before we became a Christian. That is clothing that has been put off because we are in a different place now. The old garments belonging to that place have been taken off.

We also see its *passions*. The old person we used to be was consumed, corrupted and controlled by sinful desires. These were not just bodily appetites, but also lusts of the soul. They were inward cravings which controlled us so that we were corrupted by them.

The New Person Put on

(v. 24)

We have put on the new person we are becoming. Since we have believed and bowed to Jesus, we have become new people. Now we are wearing the clothes that go with being that new person.

That new person is patterned after the Lord. We are made in His likeness. As human beings, we were created in the likeness of God. As new people in Christ, we are made anew in the likeness of God.

Our newness is in righteousness and holiness. We are made new, not just in a pattern as were Adam and Eve, but also in purity like Jesus. Now, we are not just the new humanity, we are new persons shaped and formed according the righteousness and holiness of God.

The Mind being Renewed

(v. 23)

Now we go to the center of this text. Because of the structure, this is actually the main point. Verse 23 is the center of the text and it is the central truth.

What God has done for us in the putting off and putting on is being lived out. We have been remade in our inner beings. We are “to be renewed in the spirit of our minds.” This has the same sense of the put on and put off. It is something God has done that is being realized in the process of the Christian life.

I am also struck by the phrase, “the spirit of our minds.” There is a lot of discussion as to what this means. Generally, Paul uses the word “spirit” to refer that which is of the spiritual realm. Yes, it can an attitude, a sort of mental poise. But it seems to me he is showing the connection between the inner and outer man. The mind, in Paul’s thinking, is where our soul, our heart, thinks. The spirit of our mind is the new capacity by the Holy Spirit to think on a godly way. But we still have the old brain with its mind of the flesh. So there is a process of “renewing the mind” by which the old way of thinking embedded in our brains (flesh) is replaced with new ways of thinking. This takes place as the Word comes in through the eyes and ears. It is placed in the mind and then im-

planted into the heart so that the Spirit engrafts this new way of thinking deep into our souls.

Romans 12:2 echoes this connection. Paul writes, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." Transformation takes place through this renewal of the mind. It is a radical change in our thinking that arises from having received the mind of Christ through the indwelling of the Spirit. It is about a capacity to think as God wants us to. So believing and behaving as one who is a Christian means that we are replacing old ways of thinking with new ways of thinking. As we begin thinking differently we will be discerning God's will. God's will is what God requires and what He allows.

The renewing of the mind is not merely an intellectual exercise of learning truth, doctrine, the Bible, whatever. It is learning all this in a way that causes us to stop thinking like the old people we used to be and to start thinking like the new people we are. The result is that we will be behaving like the new people. That behaving does not happen to us; it is the result of intentional obedience and wisdom.

Practical Precepts

(v. 28a)

This brings us quite naturally then to our practical precepts. Verse 28 is our focus. Since we are new persons, here is the behavior required of us.

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.

Now, I want you to be thinking of how this command applies to:

- Those who ought to be working but won't. How does this speak to men, women, teens, students all who have responsibilities to do their work, have the ability to do it, but don't.
- Those whose work is stealing. Certainly we can think of robbers, burglars and thieves. But what about people who work in jobs whose primary function is to take money from others through legal, but immoral means?
- Those who are not getting paid for your work. Does this text speak to people who are working but not at a job? What about housewives? Volunteers?
- Those whose work is going to school. Does this text have direct and powerful application to you? I want every student sitting under the sound of my voice to listen carefully to what the Lord is saying to you through this text.

Stop stealing

The command is fairly simple yet full of implications. Stop stealing. Yet, Paul frames it more in character than conduct. Let the one who is a thief, stop stealing. The Spirit is highlighting that what we do comes from who we are. We steal because we are thieves. Stealing is the occupation of a thief. A student who steals another's work (cheats, pla-

giarizes) is expressing the character of a thief. If you cheat on your taxes, it is because you have the mindset of a thief. If you spend work hours shopping or browsing the internet, you steal time and wages from your employer because you are a thief. If you use another person's account online, you do so because you are a thief. If you expect others to provide for you without you doing the labor then you are a thief.

Now, this may not be politically correct. But it is what Paul is saying. The only way you will stop stealing is to recognize that is part of the old person driven by desires and deceptions. If you say, "I am not a thief. I just..." and the ... is stealing in some way, you are not speaking like the Bible and it is unlikely that you will overcome your sinning. Young people, do not develop a habit of small thefts. If you are a believer, put off who you used to be and put on what goes with being the new person in Christ. If you are not a believer, then turn to Jesus to be delivered from your sinfulness.

Do labor in honest work

It is not enough that you stop stealing; you must also become a hard worker. At the root of stealing is either laziness or covetousness and sometimes both. The new person in Christ is dedicated to working hard. This may not just referring to hard physical labor, but rather to working hard at whatever work is pleasing to the Lord.

It is to be work that is morally right, that is honest work. Not all work, jobs, vocations are open to Christians. Some jobs are essentially immoral themselves. Prostitution would be an example. Some jobs are not honest work. They require you to do things that are dishonest either in the process or the product. In this technological age, there are a lot of jobs that hide truth behind web pages and social networks. As a Christian, you cannot provide (and I don't think, participate) in these kinds of vocations.

With your own hands

Finally, it is to be productive work, not living off the labor of others. On the surface, this is plain. Do your own work with your own hands. Students, earn your grades. Don't turn in someone else's work. Don't buy your papers on-line. Don't get the answers (or even the questions) to an exam if you are not allowed to. Those of you who work in research and writing, be sure your work is both honest and "by your own hand."

This is also a tricky area where there needs to be careful discernment. How do you define, "honest work"? In an era when a significant part of the American workforce work for the government (and I am including all levels of government education and research), this is no longer an easy question.

So, brothers and sisters, here is the Bible's call to you. Because you have put off the old and put on the new, you need to think in renewed ways about your work. You must stop stealing in all the ways we do. You must begin working hard at honest work. But, if that is all you do, that can be merely moral renovation not spiritual transformation.

Transforming Purpose

(v. 28b)

The transforming purpose highlights the heart change resulting from renewing the mind.

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.

What transforms a thief into a Biblical worker? When he or she is working in order to be able to give.

Transformed Mind

What is reflected is a transformed mind. The thinking is changed. The heart is now re-oriented in a godly way. The heart is moved from a self-focused getting to others-oriented giving.

Here is why this is important. A covetous person may satisfy their coveting by:

Stealing what is not their own. So they fulfill their covetousness by compounding their sin with theft.

Working to get everything they want. So they fulfill their covetousness by working hard and buying up what their heart craves.

The truly transformed thief has a heart that is focused on others. Rather than primarily working to satisfy what he wants, he works in order to share what others need. This is the reorientation of the heart, the renewal of the mind. The Christian goes to work for the sake of others. He may be providing for his family. But more than that, He sees his work in a Biblical community and kingdom aspect.

Changed Behavior

Their changed behavior then is because they see their work as *under* the Lord. He is directing the desires of their heart so that they work differently. They see their work as *for* the Lord. This is radical. It will have a huge impact on what Paul says later in this book about our work.

So here it is: A Christian goes to work and gathers in order to give... We are not here just talking about giving in the sense of an offering at church, although it includes that. We are talking about setting aside some money to be able to share and help a brother or sister who has a need, to give to a project, to support a missionary, to help pay someone's rent or groceries or...

Reflect and Respond

The Lord is creating transformed people. He has made us new. And now we are to live like the new people we are.

Christian obedience is active and intentional. It seeks to behave what is believed. A Christian's conduct will be the expression of their character.

If you are stealing, stop. Start working hard in honest work with you own hand.

Renew your mind in how you think about your work and why you go to your work. Seek to be pleasing to God by going, gathering and then, as the Lord enables, give.

Why does a Christian go to work?

To be able to please Christ...

To be able to provide for his family...

To be able to provide for God's Kingdom...

Why do you go to work?