

Discovering Our Purpose

“Let him who steals steal no longer”

(Eph. 4:28)

Intro: Theft in the workplace is commonly estimated to cost over \$100 billion a year in the U.S.—that is in cash, goods and property. The losses are due to these 11 "nonviolent crimes": employee pilferage, kickbacks or bribery, security theft and fraud, embezzlement, arson, burglary, vandalism, shoplifting, insurance fraud, check fraud, and credit-card fraud. What's more, there are number of employee behaviors labeled "intangible crimes" or "time theft" that would double the losses of businesses each year. These crimes include things like the fake sick days, getting someone else to punch in your card on the time clock, making personal telephone calls, conducting private business in the workplace. What these stats make clear is that theft has permeated our society just as it had the ancient Roman society.

When Paul wrote the church at Ephesus he urged them to live a distinctive moral life with this single imperative: “Walk not as the Gentiles walk...” But then he went further, explaining how to “walk the walk” by a series of contrasting statements. In studying them we’ve seen that walking the walk involves a life of honesty toward others, a real concern for what is right that may make us righteously indignant but never in a way that leads us to sin.

Let him who steals steal no longer...

Ill. the man who misread the punctuation and concluded stealing was all right. No. This says do not steal. Paul uses the Greek verb “klepto” from which we get our word “kleptomaniac”, the compulsive or neurotic thief. From the beginning God God established the right to private property by commanding man to respect the person and property of another.

In the eight commandment God said, "You shall not steal" (Ex. 20:15). And then in the tenth forbade the motivation that leads to stealing, “You shall not covet ...anything that belongs to your neighbor” (v. 17).

The seriousness of stealing is underscored in 1 Cor. 6:10.

There are several ways people may steal from others

By blatantly taking what belongs to another

From the cat burglar to shoplifting or worker who carries things off from work

5% of what you spend goes to cover business losses from theft. Approximately \$140 billion of material and time is stolen from employers every year.

Sometime folks have trouble differentiating between finding and stealing! When we take what another has lost without making reasonable effort to restore it, we are stealing from others.

To use false weights or balances or take by false accounting figures
Prov. 20:23 “Differing weights are an abomination to the Lord, and a false scale is not good.”

To gain advantage by false representation is something’s value
Prov. 11:18 “The wicked earns deceptive wages...”

Failing to provide an honest days work for a day’s wages

The sign in the store window read: NO HELP WANTED. As two men passed by, one said to the other, "You should apply--you'd be great."

Earlier we mentioned the problem in the work place of time theft. Deliberate waste and abuse of company time costs the U.S. economy billions a year. This loss is three times more than it is for recognized business crime. At some companies 20-40% of employee time is stolen. Office employees are 30% worse than blue-collar workers, perhaps because supervision isn't as close. Workers under 30 are the biggest offenders. Watch out for executives who set bad examples. If the boss is a time thief, employees will be too. Creative Management, in Homemade, May, 1985

To take what belongs to another by gambling (stealing by mutual consent)

By neglecting to pay for that which one owes

We may steal by not acknowledging and paying legitimate debts

Sometimes folks have trouble differentiating between making licensed use of what is theirs and taking the profit of others. For example, strict laws govern the licensed use of records, tapes, printed material, and computer software because the profit of those in business can be stolen from them not only by reselling their products but also by copying them and giving them away. I knew a couple of preachers who would condemn people for stealing who pirated and used thousands of dollars of computer software.

By unfairly taking from public treasuries or businesses because it does not appear to belong to anyone personally (thus misrepresentation of tax liabilities, participation in government programs for which one is not truly qualified, petty lawsuits against business for greedy purposes)

Let him labor with the hands the thing that is good...

The Greek word for “labor” suggests effort. In this society it is commonly for people to seek out and fall prey to get rich quick schemes. There was this investment company whose slogan was, “We make money the old fashioned way. We earn it.”
The Bible teaches a work ethic.

We are taught to “work to provide for our own needs (1 Thes. 4:11-12; 2 Thes. 3:10-12)

Jewish rabbis said, "If you do not teach your children a trade, you teach them to be a thief".

It occurs to me that people often steal because they are lazy. If our children learn to work, then we may morally inoculate them from theft.

In our society we have it appears a whole sub-culture of people who live with this sense of entitlement--that the world owes them a living. Lee and I receive dozens of calls each month from people in the community and passers by who think that others are obligated to provide them a living.

Work is not only needed to provide our needs; but also for our happiness. The first man owned the whole world; yet God gave him a job!!

**We are taught to accept responsibility for our families, 1Tim. 5:6
Work what is good.**

Paul does not legitimize every occupation by the word "work". Is it good? Is it honorable?

**There may be some things we ought not to make a living doing!
How about the production and sale of liquor?**

That he may have something to share with him who has need

Paul adds this ironical turn to why we labor—that we may have to share with the needy. We work not only to supply our own needs but in order to have something to share with the legitimately needy. God ennobles work by making it more than a mean to satisfy our own desires. Work becomes a tool by which we are able to live the life of love toward others.

Jas. 1:27

Gal. 6:10

This sharing is a sacrifice that pleases God (Heb. 13:15-16)

Conclusion: This is God’s purpose for the church—to walk the walk of financial integrity and compassion, to pay our own way with honorable effort and to achieve a level where we can do something for others. That’s good enough reason to get up in the morning and punch that clock. Every day when you do that you are giving glory to God.

We live in the world where it is commonly believed that all people are to some degree dishonest in their financial dealings. How a Christian stands out in such a world.