

EPHESIANS

GRACE & GLORY

Commentary and Questions | Ephesians 4:28-30 | part 11

Ephesians 4:28-30

Commentary:

When reading a passage out of Ephesians, we always have to remember where the passage falls in relation to the rest of the book. Isolating a passage by neglecting to read it in context puts Bible readers on the road to faulty interpretation. With that said, the passage we are in this week needs to be read and interpreted in light of verses 22-24. These commands in verses 28-30 are not just commands to be obeyed but are qualities of the new life! As Christians engage in the process of putting off the old self and putting on the new self through the renewing of the mind, these are some basic qualities that should appear.

Paul follows that pattern of verse 25 by first stating a negative injunction, then a positive exhortation, followed by a final motivation. The negative injunction is obviously to no longer steal. Stealing was an enormous social offense both in the Old Testament and in the Greco-Roman world of the New Testament. Stealing is not a characteristic of a new creation that is in the process of putting off the old and putting on the new. Rather, stealing is to be replaced by hard labor. The effort and ingenuity devoted to stealing should be replaced with honest work. This is the positive exhortation. Furthermore, the term for work here denotes working to the point of weariness! In other words, God is calling Christians to not do something that involves little effort (steal) and replace it with something that involves a great deal of effort (work until weary). Lastly, Paul gives us a great Gospel motive for working hard. Although Paul does not state this explicitly, an underlying assumption in this passage is that Christians should have a genuine love for people. Christians then, are called to work really hard in order to “share with anyone in need.” In a way, this is the Gospel lived out! Meeting other people’s needs is a way of communicating the love of Christ without ever saying anything. This is why the work has to be done in an honest way. If a Christian stole something and then gave it away, this would nullify the message of the Gospel and rob it of its power!

Another change in the Christian’s life is to go from speaking unwholesome words to wholesome words. The word “unwholesome” means anything that is negative, course or corrupt in any way. Paul knows the importance of words and how impactful they can be. Jesus even said in Matthew 12 that words are simply a reflection of what is in the heart. Logically, this would mean that a change of heart (becoming a new creation) would result in a change in speech. Words, however, are to be used by a Christian in a couple of different ways. First, the words of a Christian are to be used to edify and build up. Second, what a Christian says should be appropriate according to the need of the moment. Not only is the content of the words important but also how the words come across and how much is said. These are points of discernment for a Christian. Excessive talking is not edifying in any way even if what is said bears some form of truth. Lastly, the words of a Christian should give grace to those who hear.

Verse 30 is filled with a powerful motivation for believers. A Christian’s actions, work-ethic, and words should be a reflection of the new identity in Christ. Furthermore, Ephesians 1:13-14 states Christians are now sealed with the Holy Spirit. When Christians engage in activity that is sinful, it grieves the Holy Spirit. Another way of stating this is that God is grieved, upset, and heart-broken when His children sin. “All sin is painful to God, but sin in His children breaks His heart. When His children refuse to change the way of his old life for the ways of the new, God grieves” (John MacArthur).

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Questions:

1. Write down any thoughts, comments or questions that you have from the passage and/or sermon?
2. Why is it Biblically inconsistent for Christians to steal?
3. In verse 28, Paul gives us a motive to work honestly. What is that motive? Do you have this kind of motive to work honestly in your life? Explain.
4. How does the Gospel affect the way you talk? Why is it Biblically inconsistent to let corrupt talk come out of your mouth?
5. Read James 3:1-12 and Matthew 12:33-37. What are some of the things that these passages teach us about words?
6. Why do you think God cares so much about how His children talk?
7. Challenge idea: Think of one person this week to intentionally speak kindly towards.
8. According to verse 30, what does sin do to the Holy Spirit? Why?