

Ephesians 4:25–32 | “Putting Off, Putting On, Part 3: Work”

Preached on September 14, 2025 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 4:28 this morning. *[pause]*

The past few Sundays I have taken Ephesians 4:25–32, and did three sermons on it. *[pause]*

It’s all about what practically we are to “put off” and what we are to “put on,” and I have done 3 different topics found in those verses. *[pause]*

So we have looked at our words, we looked at anger last week, and now today, we will be looking at the topic of *work*. *[pauseeee]*

What is to be a Christian’s attitude and approach to work? *[pause]*

Are we supposed to just sit back and do nothing, and say, “God will take care of me”? *[pause]*

Are we supposed to bum money off of others, while we sit back and watch TV all day? *[pauseeee]*

Some people are workaholics, where their life revolves around work, and they do almost nothing else.

And others see work as a necessary evil—necessary only in order to pay the bills and get by. *[pause]*

Still other people may work, but while they are at work, they seem to do everything, *but work*. *[pauseeee]*

The head of a New York firm posted a message on its notice board that said, “Some time between starting and quitting time...

Without infringing on lunch periods, coffee breaks, rest periods, story-telling...holiday planning and the rehashing of yesterday’s television programmes...

We ask that each employee try to find some time for a *work* break. *[pause]*

This may seem radical but it might aid steady employment and assure regular pay cheques.”¹ *[pauseeee]*

Sadly, even those who work at a job can be lazy.

But how are we as Christians supposed to live our lives when it comes to work? *[pauseeee]*

Little do some people realize, but the Bible does share with us how we are to approach work.

¹ Original Source: *Manchester Guardian* (October 1965). Found at: John Stott, *The Preacher’s Notebook: The Collected Quotes, Illustrations, and Prayers of John Stott*, ed. Mark Meynell (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018). (Italics were added by me.)

And the verse before us this morning won't tell us everything that the Bible says about work, but it will show us some things that we need to know. *[pause]*

Let's READ Ephesians 4:28 to see what Paul says. *[READ]*

Now before we get to work, we must first see what NOT to do, and it's this...

I. Don't steal anymore from others!

In order to do work the right way that God has called us to, we must get rid of stealing, first. *[pauseeee]*

You can't steal and think that you are a good, hard worker.

For imagine an employee continually taking money from the workplace—you wouldn't think that they were a good employee, would you? *[pauseeee]*

According to a 1975 report, "Theft in the workplace is commonly estimated to cost between \$30 billion and \$40 billion a year in the U.S."² *[pause]*

Just imagine what it would be today, if you took into account inflation.

Apparently, there's a lot more theft that happens than we realize! *[pauseeeee]*

Stealing is an ever-accruing reality in our fallen world...

Just open up a newspaper, or click on a news article, and you'll probably see some sort of theft reported there. *[pause]*

We hear of smaller theft, as when someone takes a couple items from Walmart.

But we also hear of major theft—when someone embezzles millions of dollars over several years. *[pauseeee]*

I remember when I was little and getting my bicycle stolen—I still think I know who did it, but I could never prove it. *[pauseeee]*

Well it's stealing that Paul talks about in our passage today, for he says, "Let the thief no longer steal." *[pause]*

Following Paul's pattern here of first telling us what to put away, and then what to put on—Paul tells us to put away stealing. *[pauseeee]*

Pretty much every community and culture has considered stealing as wrong, for if everyone stole all the time, then society would turn into utter chaos. *[pause]*

² Original Source: *Parade Magazine*, May 27, 1990, p. 7. Found at: <https://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/t/theft.htm>.

Ask anyone and they will inherently know that you are not to steal from others. *[pause]*

More importantly, God tells us that stealing is wrong, for it's one of the 10 Commandments: "You shall not steal."³ *[pauseeee]*

Stealing most certainly has to do with our old, pre-Christ lifestyle.

Therefore, no wonder Paul says to not do it, for we are new in Christ, and so should reflect that in our lives. *[pauseeeee]*

Stealing is taking what's not rightfully yours—it's taking from someone else to have for yourself. *[pauseeee]*

Now what does stealing demonstrate or reveal about a person's heart? *[pause]*

First, it reveals a greedy or covetous heart. *[pause]*

A person so strongly desires money or possessions, that they take it from another person...

That money or that possession has become like an idol in their heart, where they think, "I HAVE to have that; I NEED it!" *[pause]*

It's like they become so zeroed in on that material possession that *nothing* can deter them. *[pauseeee]*

Stealing reveals a greedy or covetous heart, and I wonder if we have any traces of greed or covetousness in *our* hearts? *[pause]*

We need to be careful, for our greed and covetousness let go could lead to theft. *[pauseeee]*

Are you always looking for more, more, and more? *[pause]*

Are you envious of what someone else has, and constantly dwelling upon it?

Put that away, realizing what you are doing, and be content with what you have, trusting the Lord. *[pauseeee]*

What else does stealing reveal in a heart? It reveals *laziness*. *[pause]*

To steal is to be lazy, do you realize that? *[pause]*

When someone takes something from someone else, they are really putting a big sign over themselves, saying...

"I am so lazy that instead of working hard to get it myself, I took it from someone else." *[pauseeee]*

³ Exodus 20:15.

Now I don't believe that thieves see themselves as lazy, but it's true. *[pause]*

Sometimes people steal because the item is right there in front of them, and they don't want to take the time and effort to go get their own somewhere else with their own money. *[pauseeee]*

Shouldn't this make us become more serious about our own laziness? *[pause]*

I'm not saying that if you are a little bit lazy then you will become a thief, but I'm simply saying that we must realize that laziness can *lead* there. *[pause]*

Unchecked laziness can take you places that you ought never to go, so be alert, and be on guard in your own heart. *[pauseeee]*

You see, ultimately stealing reveals the overarching trait of *selfishness*. *[pauseeee]*

Stealing is straight up selfishness on display. *[pause]*

You want something, so you take something.

You are out to *get* for yourself, and so you will do something evil to get it. *[pauseeee]*

That greed, that covetousness, that laziness are all outworkings of a selfish heart. *[pause]*

Stealing reflects a person, who is out for him or herself, for consider what stealing does—*stealing hurts others to benefit myself*. *[pauseeee]*

That's the essence of stealing: *I* sinfully gain, and *you* lose. *[pauseeee]*

Sometimes people act like stealing won't hurt anyone, but someone always loses something in theft...

There's always a victim. *[pauseeee]*

Now I want us to think about how stealing can be done in various ways. *[pause]*

I think the first thing that pops in our minds when it comes to stealing is the stealing of merchandise at a store, stealing a car, or stealing someone's stuff from their house.

But stealing can be done in other ways, too. *[pause]*

Let's say that someone lets you borrow something of theirs, and you never give it back—that's stealing...

It's not yours, and yet you are keeping it. *[pause]*

Stealing can happen if you lie on your tax return, plagiarize, sit around and do nothing while getting paid at work, and so much more. *[pauseeee]*

So what is Paul's instruction to us—no longer steal! *[pause]*

No more! Stop doing it!

That may have happened in your past, but guess what?

It doesn't have to be your present or future, and really, it shouldn't be. [pauseeee]

So what should we do, instead?...

II. Do honest, hard work to give to others!

It's interesting that Paul didn't just say, "Let the thief no longer steal," for he could have, but he adds what good we should be doing in its place. [pause]

This is because, as we have been seeing—Christians are not just those who avoid sin, but they are also those who do good, too. [pauseeee]

Sinful actions should be replaced with godly actions—put off AND put on. [pauseeee]

There are some people who will say, "I never harm others!"

And that's a good thing, but the question that I have is this, "But have you ever *helped* others?" [pauseeee]

I feel like American Christianity can fall into this trap. [pause]

Many professing Christians will avoid bad things, and think that they have done their Christian duty, but then they just live for themselves, and don't serve others.

Yet God wants us to avoid sin AND do good. [pauseeee]

So after telling the thief to no longer steal, listen to what Paul says next, "But rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands." [pauseeee]

Instead of stealing, the thief should labor. [pause]

Here we see the truth that God wants His people to do hard work. [pause]

Now let me first say this—Paul isn't focused on the exceptions to this rule, but he's focused on the ordinary Christian. [pause]

There are some people who are physically or mentally *unable* to work—Paul isn't speaking about those people.

In fact, Paul knows that there are people like that, for they may very well be the person "in need," which Paul talks about at the end of this verse. [pause]

Also, over in 1 Timothy, Paul makes it clear that the church should provide for certain widows, who have no one to care for them.⁴

And in Acts 20, he says, “In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak.”⁵ *[pauseeee]*

There are those who are physically or mentally unable to work and provide for themselves, and so Paul isn’t speaking about those types of people here. *[pause]*

So if that’s you, know that this isn’t directed towards you.

Yet consider, though, what things you *could* do, and what good you *can* do, as far as you can. *[pauseeeee]*

OK, let’s get back to the general truth—Paul tells the thief to no longer steal, but to do honest, hard work. *[pauseeeee]*

Paul’s instructions here show us what every ordinary, able-bodied Christian is called to do: honest, hard work. *[pauseeee]*

Christians are not to be slackers, couch potatoes, or lazy bums—rather, they are to be *hard workers!* *[pause]*

God cares about whether we work hard or not, do you realize that? *[pause]*

When others think of us, they should consider us hard workers, and not lazy people. *[pause]*

So at the workplace, are you considered ‘the lazy one’? *[pauseeee]*

Paul says, “Let him *labor*.” *[pause]*

That word ‘labor’ is a term used for exerting yourself and toiling.

It’s a term used for hard work—work that wearies and tires you. *[pause]*

This shows us that Christians are not to be those allergic to some good, hard, toilsome work! *[pause]*

They shouldn’t be afraid to get their hands dirty, sweat, groan, strain, and get tired from some good effort. *[pauseeee]*

Now there are different types of work: some do manual labor and some do mental labor, but they are all labor nonetheless. *[pauseeee]*

There’s an illustration that says, “There are three kinds of workers…”

⁴ A reference to 1 Timothy 5:3–16.

⁵ Acts 20:35.

For example, when a piano is to be moved, the first kind gets behind and pushes, the second pulls and guides, and the third grabs the piano stool.”⁶ *[pause]*

Which kind of worker are you? *[pauseeeee]*

Not only are we to do hard work, but also *honest* work. *[pause]*

That word translated as ‘honest’ is really a Greek word which means ‘good’...

He is to do “good” work. *[pause]*

The idea is probably honest, upright, honorable, and socially acceptable work—so nothing illegal or unethical.

But it may also communicate that our work should be good, quality work and not lazily done. *[pause]*

We should also do work that is useful and beneficial to others. *[pauseeeee]*

Are you involved in good, honest, hard work, or are you always trying to find ways to avoid that kind of work? *[pauseeeee]*

Notice also that Paul says that he should “work with his own hands.”

That is, do not sit back and be dependent on others, but *you* get to work with your own hands to provide for yourself. *[pauseeee]*

For the thief, his hands were previously used for stealing, but now his hands are to be used in honest, hard work.

So use your hands in good, righteous ways! *[pauseeeee]*

So Christian: do honest, hard work—that is God’s instruction to you, if you are physically and mentally able. *[pause]*

Don’t be afraid of some toil and strain, but labor hard, doing work that is some good, honest work. *[pauseeee]*

At the workplace, Christians should be some of the hardest workers there are.

So when people think of Christians, if they try to find things wrong with us, they shouldn’t be able to say, “They’re lazy.” *[pauseeeee]*

Now you would think that that would be the end of Paul’s instructions for the thief: “Don’t steal, but work hard with your own hands,” — great! *[pause]*

⁶ Unknown Source. Found at: <https://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/w/work.htm>.

That would make sense, wouldn't it, but Paul *doesn't* stop there, does he? *[pause]*

He gives a reason for why the thief should work hard, and it's not simply to provide for himself.

For He says, "but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need." *[pauseeee]*

Isn't that interesting?

The thief isn't just to stop stealing, nor is the thief just to work hard to provide for his own needs, but the thief is to share with those in need. *[pauseeeee]*

So get this—the thief used to be a "taker," but now he is to be transformed into a "giver." *[pause]*

As one commentator put it: "The thief is to become a philanthropist."⁷ *[pauseeee]*

Before, the thief got what he wanted in a sinful manner, and so hurt others.

But now, he gets what he needs honestly, and someone else is helped by him. *[pause]*

What a radical transformation! *[pause]*

God wants us to not just avoid hurting others, but he also wants us to help others...

He wants to transform 'takers' into 'givers'! *[pauseeeee]*

I want you to really think about the truth that is stated here—one reason for why we are to work hard is to give to others. *[pause]*

Oh, fellow American Christians, how so many of us have been mistaken about how to view work! *[pause]*

Most American Christians would be perfectly fine with Paul ending verse 28 right before the "so that."

It would make perfect sense to us, and we would say, "Yes, that falls in line with what I do! I don't steal, but I work hard!" but verse 28 doesn't end before the "so that." *[pause]*

Rather, it tells us to work hard, in order to give to others. *[pauseeeee]*

Consider how people usually view work and the wages they get from it...

Some see work as a "necessary evil" that we just have to do in order to pay the bills. *[pause]*

These are people who live for the weekend, and find the weekdays a complete drudgery.

⁷ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, vol. 42, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1990), 304.

But Paul doesn't write as if hard work were simply a necessary evil, does he? *[pause]*

He sees it as necessary, but necessary to do good. *[pauseeee]*

Also, since God calls us to hard work, then it cannot be a necessary evil, for nothing God calls us to do is evil.

Rather, it is to be done in order to bless others. *[pauseeee]*

Another wrong view of work that has infiltrated the Christian mind is a view of work that says, "It's *my* money, I've worked hard for it!" *[pauseeee]*

These types of people think, "OK, I've covered my needs, and now all of the extra that I have can be used on what I want..."

And *maybe* if I have some extra after all of that, then I'll give to others." *[pause]*

That's not the philosophy of work that Paul presents here at all...

The purpose of working hard is not just so that you can buy all of these fun things for yourself, but it's to provide for your needs and to provide for the needs of others. *[pauseeee]*

You see, we often think, "I work hard to pay my bills, and have some fun."

But Paul is telling us that it should be, "I work hard to pay my bills, and to give to others." *[pauseeee]*

We gain, not to hoard for ourselves, but to generously share with others. *[pause]*

Have we forgotten the Lord's words that, "It is more blessed to give than to receive"?⁸ *[pauseeee]*

We work hard in order to *have* something to share with anyone who *has* need. *[pause]*

We impart to others, giving them a share of what we have obtained. *[pauseeee]*

Too often we view our money and possessions as ours and ours alone, but really, it's the Lord's, and it's to be generously given to others. *[pauseeee]*

There's a story of 101 year-old Lydia Hart. *[pause]*

Lydia "delivers meals to low-income senior citizens with the charity Meals on Wheels. *[pause]*

She rides shotgun and navigates for her 72-year-old partner, helping the 'little old ladies,' as she refers to her clients. *[pause]*

She even speaks of the blessing she gets from being of service... *[pauseeee]*

⁸ Jesus quoted by Paul in Acts 20:35.

Even at over a century old, Lydia takes what she has and employs it in the service of others.”⁹
[pauseeee]

How does your mindset about work need to change to align with what the Bible says? *[pause]*

Do you work just to “get” for yourself, and yourself alone—or do you work hard in order to give to others, too? *[pauseeee]*

Consider how you spend your money; look at your budget categories—what does it reflect?
[pause]

What percentage of your money is given to those in need? *[pause]*

Some people make a “giving to others” budget category, where they put a certain budget amount in there, and then as the year goes on, they give it out to people. *[pause]*

Could you do that as a simple starting point? *[pauseeee]*

You must work hard to provide for your own needs, or else you would be one of those “in need.”

But once you have provided for your needs, you need to be looking outwards to others in need.
[pauseeee]

Paul is showing us that there are needy people among us, and we ought to be caring for them.
[pauseeee]

Wouldn’t it be great if a Christian knew about another Christian’s financial need, and said, “I’m going to work some overtime the next few weeks, and give all of that money to that person.”
[pause]

Why does that seem so foreign to us, when that reflects the teaching of Scripture?! *[pauseeee]*

Wouldn’t it be great if a Christian knew about a need, and thought, “I’m going to cut back on some unnecessary expenses, and use all of that money towards this need.” *[pause]*

Or, “How about instead of going on that vacation to the beach this year, we did a simpler, less expensive vacation, and used the difference to go to this need over here”? *[pauseeee]*

What wonderful examples of people who work hard, but don’t work hard to hoard, but work hard to help others. *[pauseeee]*

How do you need to change your mindset about work and money to reflect God’s command here? *[pauseeee]*

Christians don’t work hard for themselves alone, but they work hard for others, too...

⁹ Jim L. Wilson and Rodger Russell, “Serving Meals at 101,” in *300 Illustrations for Preachers*, ed. Elliot Ritzema (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015).

Wouldn't that change your attitude when you go to work? *[pause]*

To go into work thinking, "I'm working hard today to bless others," and what an honor, privilege, and joy that is! *[pauseeeee]*

You see...

Christians are to be givers, not takers.

The world says, "Live for yourself!" but it's a way of life that doesn't satisfy, and it leaves you empty.

But Christ says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."¹⁰ *[pauseeee]*

We are not to be those who live our lives for self: where the world, our work, our energy, our money, or our possessions revolve around us and what we want.

No, we don't live for self, rather, we live for the Lord, and living for the Lord means living to serve, help, and bless others. *[pauseeeee]*

How can we live in such a way? Because we are reflecting our giving God. *[pause]*

He is the Lord, who has given us everything...

He created the world, gave us life and breath, and has provided us with everything we need. *[pause]*

He gives us gifts, abilities, brains, and energy to live and work, but on top of that, He has given us His precious Son, Jesus, who died for us and rose again. *[pause]*

He gives all those who trust in Christ forgiveness, eternal life, adoption, wisdom and insight, and so much more. *[pauseeeee]*

God is the ultimate Giver, who has given us so much through Christ, so how could we not be 'givers' now in light of the Cross? *[pauseeee]*

Through Jesus, the Lord turns us, who were 'takers,' and transforms us into 'givers.' *[pause]*

Through His work in our life, He molds us to reflect Him, and so bless others with what we have.

So will you look to Him, rely upon Him, and reflect Him in your life? *[pause]*

Will you be a 'giver' or a 'taker'?

¹⁰ Jesus quoted by Paul in Acts 20:35.