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**“I am NOT a Thief!”
Ephesians 4:28**

The November 10, 1996 issue of the Detroit News reported that pro basketball player Chris Webber severed his ties and a very lucrative contract with NIKE because they refused to lower the price of the basketball shoe that they named after Weber. Chris is quoted in the article saying, “How can I charge that price for my shoe when I speak to all those inner city kids and then preach to them? The shoes priced at \$140 per pair actually cost NIKE only \$5 to make in foreign countries. Weber also didn’t like NIKE’s marketing strategy to target the inner city youth as they attempt to initiate buying trends that could spread to the suburbs. He called the whole business “highway robbery” and just another sophisticated form of stealing where the costs are hidden in legal contracts and even what looks like honest business methods, but are designed to rip off and fool the customer.

Ever been ripped off, stolen blind by deceptive business practice. If you are in business it happens every day. Ever been enticed to buy something only to discover it’s not at all what they claimed it to be? A contract that is not fulfilled? The hidden fine print on returns? It’s all thievery. Stealing is very easy to see when we are the ones getting ripped off...but what about when we are the ones doing the stealing?

Turn with me in your Bibles to Ephesians 4:28, (READ). That word for stealing is Kleptos. We get our English word Kleptomaniac, one who habitually takes things that do not belong to him. Most of us think to ourselves. I’m sure glad I’m not a Klepto. I’m not a thief. I don’t habitually take from others that which is not mine. This morning my purpose is to do several things. First I want to expose the ways we steal. Next expose the reasons that drive us to steal. Third, after exposing the

lies we believe that drive us to steal, I want to apply the truth that ought to keep us from stealing. Then finally I want to show how God desires us to take it to a higher level. So I want to expose our sinful actions, stealing. Expose the lies we believe that are driving our sinful actions. Then I want to apply God's truth and see how God wants us to take it to a higher level.

This section in Ephesians 4 has been challenging us to put off the old man and put on the new. V.22 Put off, or lay aside the old self that is being corrupted in the lusts of deceit. The old self is believes lies and causes us to live in habits, behaviors and patterns that are destructive. So v.23 tells us we need a renewed mind. When we come to Christ we were made into a new creation. Old things are past away behold new things come. We are now "in Christ" and we ought to then be walking in the new behaviors and habits because we are no longer who we used to be. We are to put on a new self that ought to look more and more righteous each year. We ought to grow increasingly disgusted with our old ways of thinking our old passions, old pleasures, old worn out habits and become increasingly living and walking in step with the Spirit. V. 25 tells us it starts with putting off the lies and put on truth. We are to speak truth and live truth and keep it real with each other. V.26 call us to put off sinful anger and put on righteous anger that gets angry about the right things and in the right way with the right person, for the right reason. And that the time to be angry is always short. So then in v. 28 Paul writes to the believers in Ephesus to put off stealing instead, work and do what is good.

Lets start this morning by exposing the problem; In what ways do we steal? Certainly there is the obvious. Taking material things that do not belong to us. When Nathan's car was left overnight in the church overflow parking lot this week someone came along and decided that he needed Nathan's 3/4 tank of gas and siphoned it into his own tank. That is stealing. People enter homes and barns and steal things that are not

theirs. That is the typical sense of stealing material things. But its not just the big things that is stealing. When we fail to report income made on side jobs on the income tax return we are stealing from the people of this nation. You may grab a pack of gum or slip a candy into your pocket at the grocery store. That is stealing. You may copy software that you have not paid for, or music CD's that you have not paid for, that is all stealing. Picture yourself taking money from the pocket of the artist that you so enjoy listening to.

I remember hearing a story about a lady who took her 11 year old son to the amusement park. The sign on the gate stated children ten and under were free with a paid adult. She told the boy if the man taking tickets asks you, just tell him your 10, after all your birthday was only two weeks ago. He got in free and all seemed to go well until they got to a very exciting ride and at the entrance sign stated. "must be 12 or older to ride this ride." The little boy looked up at the mom and asked; "So how old am I now?" The lies help her steal from the amusement park, backfired on her once she got in. That is the way stealing is. It lies to you. Stealing looks like a great short-cut to get what you want, but along with it you get all the that the old life has to offer. You get the tension, the heartache, the frustration, the web of sin that keeps multiplying sin.

False advertising is stealing, bait and switch techniques is stealing. Promising to keep a schedule and knowing you cannot ever provide the services in that amount of time but you say it just to land the job. That is stealing. Calling in sick is stealing. Unless the company has told you that what they call "sick days" is really a personal day for any reason. If you call in sick when you are not, it is the same as taking something that is not yours. Department stores lose 8 billion dollars a year due to inventory shortages. Of those loses 10 percent was due to clerical error. 30 percent due to shoplifting. Stealing from people outside the store. An incredible 60 percent (16 million dollars a day) is due to theft by

employees. (Hughes p152). Padding the expense accounts, postage and free copies at work. Its all stealing.

Last year before the mountain blew I climbed Mt. Saint Helens. Now we had planed to climb it when you didn't need permits, but the weather was bad and the trip got delayed and we found out that week before they began to require \$15 dollar climbing permits. They only allowed a certain number of them and the last one was sold right in front of me. We had everything ready. Gotten up early in the morning. Driven way out there. If we had climbed just the week before we didn't need a permit. It easy to rationalize isn't it. We figured the ranger would be up on the mountain. We will just climb up until we found him and ask if we can buy a permit from him. If not we would just climb back down. You know we climbed that whole mountain up and down and never found him. But I didn't feel right about it because I in effect stole \$15 from the Forest Service who pay people to maintain that area.

We also steal in immaterial ways. We steal peoples time by being ill-prepared, not showing up. Students and teachers who are not prepared are stealing peoples time. Meetings that are not well prepared for and planned out are stealing peoples time. When we show up late and people are waiting for us, we are stealing from them. When we don't put in our full energy or effort or focus we are stealing from our teachers or employers. When we claim another's ideas as our own we are stealing. In studying for my sermons, I study God's word but I also read what God has revealed to a dozen other believers in their books and writings. I want to present the best material God has for us. I want to provide the best spiritual meal I can so I study hard. But if the material is not common knowledge, I need to document in my sermons where I got it from just like your papers at school, or else it's stealing. It's easy to forget and get lazy with that. When we do personal things while getting paid at work to perform in the companies interest that is stealing. Claiming a new idea at work is yours and it wasn't is stealing. When we do our

homework without work. Not checking our answers but copying answers, that is stealing. Looking at a neighbors' test for answers is stealing knowledge.

A football player was caught stealing answers at school. He was sitting next to an honor's student and the teacher became very suspicious because their answers were very similar. But the clincher was when the honor's student answered question #10 by writing, "I don't know" and the football player answered the same question by writing, "me neither".

You can steal another person's reputation by tearing down their character, slandering them, criticisms and cut-downs. Leaders seem to be free target in our culture. Yet these men are placed by God we take shots at them stealing their reputation behind their backs. Last year a fellow pastor in town came and said someone had started a rumor going around town that I was yelling profanity at the kids on the baseball field. That is the most ridiculous thing I had heard. I believe what happens is people who hear profanity all the time hear me say "shoot", or in mock frustration yell, "throw the pickin ball" and they apply other words that are embedded in their minds. I have plenty of faults but I do not use swear words. But the rumors cause the church and body of Christ damage and steal from me reputation, time and emotional energy trying to repair and clear up the damage. I don't know how President Bush or Clinton read a newspaper.

People can stealing another person's joy. Steal someones hope. Steal someones applause. A child's innocence can be stolen with the movies and videos they are allowed to watch. When you commit adultery, fornication or lust on another, you are stealing from another person taking that which does not rightfully belong to you. If I were to ask would we have many people able to stand up and "I am not a thief" now??? Convicting isn't it.

Let me dig even further then. We steal not only the material and immaterial things. We also steal spiritually which may well be the worst of all. In first part of this chapter Ephesians 4 we learned that we are all given spiritual gifts and we are all part of the body of Christ. But we are stealing from God and each other member of the body when we fail, or refuse to use our gifts to benefit the body of Christ. When we fail to do our part in the body, that is spiritual stealing. In Malachi 3:8,9 It says "Will a man rob God? (people answer, "Why how have we possibly stolen from God?") In tithes and offerings. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and test me in this says the Lord of hosts if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows." The church is the storehouse. If everyone here would stop ripping off God and bring their offerings to the Lord we would easily be able to make out budgets and have plenty more to give away to help more people. Malachi explains how God was not impressed with the people of Israel. He said they spent plenty of money and time on their paneled houses, yet the temple of God was left in shambles. We spend money on our landscapes and remodels and new cars and clothes and toys and entertainments and hobbies and rip God off by failing to tithe...God is not impressed with us. He told the people of Israel in Mal 3:9 "you are cursed with a curse for robbing me, the whole nation of you." We cannot afford to keep stealing from God. For when we fail to live as God would want us, we fail to live as lights and steal from God's character. People look at us and say if that Christian is what God looks like then I want no part of it. When we steal from God we are stealing from His character. When we fail to give God what rightfully belongs to Him and that includes our praise and worship, then we are ripping God off, we are stealing from His pocket. Now I hope I have not left anybody out this morning in convincing us that we are thieves.

Now that we've exposed our habits of stealing. I'd like to now ask the question. **What drives us to steal? What are the lies that I am**

believing that motivate me to steal? Satan is not only the father of lies, but John 10:10 says he is a thief that comes not only to steal but to destroy and kill” Jesus has come that we might have life and have it more abundantly. So what drives us to steal? We steal because it looks like a great short cut. We want it without the work. We want what is not ours and believe that the only way, or the easiest way to get it is to steal. When I steal I am consumed by my own desires and I am totally blind to the needs of others. When I steal I am taking things out of God’s hands, out of your hands and into mine. When I steal I am believing the lie that God will not provide for me what I need. We are driven to steal by messed up thinking about God’s loving provision for us. In his book Tender Commandments Ron Mehl writes, “ When we look at all that God has given and decide that it is not enough, when we hear what God commands and decide that his words really don’t apply to me, then we have set the stage for taking the next step – taking things that do not belong to us.

That happened to Eve in the garden didn’t it. Genesis 3; The fruit was declared by God to be off-limits but then you can read the progression. She saw, she desired and she took. The same thing happened to king David in his early forties taking a stroll on his roof. He looked down and happened to see a beautiful woman bathing. Same Hebrew words are used. He saw. He desired. He took.

When we steal we have forgotten God and doubt in His ability to provide for us. We are also ungrateful and not content about what he has provided for us. We are prideful to think that the commands of God really don’t apply to us in this particular situation and are so adept at rationalizing our theft and do mental gymnastics turning ourselves into a modern day Robin Hood that claims as long as its for our greater good its OK to steal. Doesn’t God want me to do well in school get good grades so that I can get a good job and provide for my family? Doesn’t he want my father to avoid sinful anger at me? So I’ll cheat and steal answers. We

rationalize and excuse our sin. We reject and forget God's generous provision for us.

So Ephesians 4:28 tells us not to steal any longer. We might stop stealing for convenience. Afraid we might get caught. But if we are pretty sure there is little chance of penalty we would go right back to stealing. So how can we stop those old self behaviors how? By exposing the sin, exposing the lies that are driving the sin and **then by applying truth**. Certainly God commands us to obey him but it seems if its just rote obedience without any heart change it not going to last. We must be renewed in a desire to obey what God's says and believe the truth. The truth we must allow to motivate us is that God is a loving father and God will provide for us what we need, not my greeds, but my needs. Ron Mehl writes, " God is saying "I don't want you stealing because I am your provider. I want you to understand and believe that I am the One who will supply all your needs. I don't want you to feel responsible for securing your own future. For the truth is that every time we steal something, large or small, we are saying, "I will be my own provider in this instance. If I don't take it now, I will be the loser." God wants us not to steal because he wants us to trust him totally. Philippians 4:19 "My god shall supply all your needs according to His riches and glory in Christ Jesus." God wants us to rest in contentment in His provision. That's the truth we must see and believe and live out and apply if we are going to stop our sinning. In order to think that way we must be renewed in the spirit of our mind. We need to put on new thinking about God and ourselves. We must expose the lies and apply the truth. Hebrews 13:5-6 "Keep yourselves free from the love of money. Be content with what you have for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

So the antidote for getting rid of the old behavior is instead of stealing to work, instead of taking to give. Ephesians 4:28 tells us we are no longer to steal, but we are to work and our work ought to be doing something that is worthwhile and good. God created us to work. Work is

God's ordained method of getting what we need. Work is not a curse it is a blessing. Adam was working in the garden before the fall. In failing to work, you are failing to live up to what God has called you to do. Ephesians 2:10 "...created in Christ Jesus for good work." Some of us need to change your language instead of saying I have to work, I get to work. I wonder how that might affect the way our own children view their own chores? Our work ought to be doing something that is good. Ask yourself, Is my job doing something that is good? Am I helping people a needed service. Or are there aspects of my job that are enabling people bad behavior?

John Piper writes that we can steal to have, or we can work to have. Or we can work to give. Look at the end of v.28 we are to work "in order that he may have something to share with him who has need." Stealing is an illegal way to satisfy our greed, but working may just be a legal way to satisfy our greed. When we are working to give, to be able to share with others and be a blessing to others, we are putting on the new man. The world is not all that impressed with believers who simply stop stealing. It is pretty tough for them to tell whether or not the stealing has stopped because of fear of getting caught or a trust in God's provision. To stop stealing is putting off the old man, but to put on the new is to work in order to give. Working for the benefit of others is radical and a transformation must take place the changes takers into givers. That certainly takes it to a higher level doesn't it? God is a giver and his children gives, that is a family trait (Kent Hughes) Christ's disciples don't steal, they see the needs of others and deny themselves in order to give to others.

So what? Where is God telling you to begin to apply the message this morning? Perhaps God has convicted you in areas where you are stealing and have never thought about before. Robbing God of what is due him in offerings, or giftedness or robbing the body of Christ of yourself. The first step may need to be confession to God, to someone

else. Then you may need to make it right. Perhaps you saw this morning there were some lies you were believing that subtly led you to steal from others. And you need to put on contentment and thankfulness and trust in God's loving provision renew your mind with truth. Perhaps some of us need to take this to an even higher level than just putting off the old man, and putting on the new man in working to give and be a benefit to others. I'm always encouraged when as a pastor I hear of some of you businessmen listening to the spirits prompting and on occasion helping those in need. I hear of many instances of giving and have been a gift broker to others on occasion. Perhaps an application giving of ones time might be to spend time saying "I love you to the people of Yacolt" and wash some cars on June 11th. That is working to give, no donations accepted. I was impressed with our church body knowing we are struggling financially to vote to increase our giving mid-year to missions. I think that the best way to increase our budget is to give more away to others. Perhaps some of you want to scholarship some kids in the community to go on this rafting trip with the cows. God will let you know where he wants you to give. And he will bless. Test him in it. Word not to have, work in order to give and be a blessing to others and you in turn will be blessed.