

## MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: Deconstruction / Reconstruction of the Disciples' Life Part 5

Characteristics of the Reconstructed Life (2)

Ephesians 4:28-32

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 01.13-14.10

Good morning. Thanks for coming out to Crossroads today. It was good seeing Wendell up here on the platform giving us an update. If you want some more information don't hesitate to stop out at the kiosk. He'll be there to give you any updates or answer any questions you may have. We love Wendell. He's doing a great job. We often tease him – give him a hard time because he's the oldest member of our staff and we're routinely reminding him of that. That came home for me this week. We were having a side conversation in the hallway here and we were talking about all the snow that we'd been getting. He said, yeah, I can not believe the amount of snow. I haven't seen a blizzard like this since '88. It took me back for a minute. I said we didn't have a blizzard in '88. Then I realized he meant 1888. Made all the sense in the world. With all that age brings experience though so you thank him when you have the opportunity.

Well, let's turn to Ephesians chapter 4. Let's take our bibles, join together in turning to a passage now that's becoming very familiar to you I'm sure. We're in a series called the Deconstruction / Reconstruction of the Disciple's Life. We're working our way through Ephesians 4:17 through 5:21. We're looking at just this section and if you're just joining us then let me give you a little bit of an update. The whole section really deals with our walk and we learn that walk definitely has a connotation more than just moving from point A to point B. It's the idea of our conduct, our lifestyle as followers of Christ. If the old has been taken off of us, the new has been put on us. We are new creations in Christ; therefore we ought to walk that way. This is one of Paul's favorite concepts; uses it all through the book of Ephesians. For example, he uses it in Ephesians 2:2; 2:10; 4:1; 4:17; 5:2; 5:8; 5:15. In other words, all throughout the book of Ephesians. Not only that, but he uses it in many of his other writings. In the book of Romans, in 2 Corinthians, in Galatians, in Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians. Why so often? Why the repeated use of the same theme? It's because it's essential to know how to walk in a manner worthy of our salvation. It's essential for us to understand what we must now be like as followers of Christ.

Now Paul gets very specific as we come to verse 25 and this is where we were at last week. We started to unpack the 5 characteristics of the reconstructed life and we got through to a couple of them just helping us understand these are now what should characteristics that we embody as Christ followers.

Let me just give you a quick update. Let's go back to verse 25. He says this. He says, therefore, having put away falsehood let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor for we are members of one another. So the first thing that we learn was what? That we are to stop lying and speak the truth. In other words, falsehood, no matter what degree of falsehood we might invent, falsehood is falsehood and we shouldn't have any part of it but rather we should be people who do what? Speak the truth. And, what did we learn about that truth? That it means reality. That the best way to understand truth is that

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we're just open and honest about reality. Everybody else can see. We speak the truth. And that should be what is named among us. Stop lying. Speak the truth he says.

Now, continuing in that we also learned, verse 26 and 27 that we are to trade unrighteous anger for righteous anger. Remember that? We talked about the idea that he uses two words in this passage in the Greek text to mean two different things. He uses one word in the English; two in the Greek to mean different things. For example, he says we can be angry and not sin. How's that possible? How can we be angry and not sin? Well, it comes with an understanding that means righteous indignation. It's the Greek word *orge*. We can be righteously angry but it's not necessarily a sin. Best example of that is when Jesus was cleansing the temple. There were people around. They were setting up little shops; different things you could buy as you went into the temple to make sacrifices and they were making money off of the worshippers. Jesus did not like that, He formed a whip and with righteous anger he cleansed the temple. That wasn't a sin. We feel the same way, for example, when we see someone who is taking advantage of by the system. And we say, that's just not right. That's righteous anger. But Paul says, second use of the word anger, different Greek word. It's the word *parorgismos*. It means this explosive, self-serving kind of anger. He says, don't let that happen in your life. In fact, don't let the day come to an end feeling that way without dealing with it. Why? Well, look at verse 27. It says, we are to give no opportunity to the devil. He says, if you do that it's like putting a foothold in your life for the devil and so don't do it. Trade unrighteous anger for righteous anger he says.

Now we come to verse 28. We start into a new area that we didn't cover last week. We're still trying to unearth these five characteristic. We've learned two. Today we're going to work on the third one. Look at verse 28. He says, 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 do we learn here? We are end stealing and begin sharing. We're to end stealing and begin sharing. This is a characteristic of the new life. Now right away you might be thinking, well, how are we going to spend all of this time on this one passage? You might be thinking, I'm not a thief. I'm not someone who steals. Let's unpack this to see how we might be able to apply this to ourselves.

Look at the text. He says this. He says, let the thief. Now, you need to understand that word. That word is *klepto* in the Greek. It's where we get the word *kleptomaniac*. He says, let the stealer no longer steal. That's literally what this mean. He says, you should not be someone who steals something. That's really part of our unredeemed nature is this desire to have something for nothing. If you see this word as something that relates to just the idea of taking, you would be right. This is exactly what this word means. It's not in totality what this word means. But, you would be right. This is the sense of the word. If you take something without paying for it the scriptures say you are a thief. Today we understand that as you would be a thief. Nothing's changed.

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I lived this example actually when I was thirteen years old. There was a store right over the hill from us from this building that used to be called Uncle Bill's and if you've lived in Mansfield long enough you remember Uncle Bill's. You might actually remember probably two places: Uncle Bill's and Five Cousins. Those were the two, kind of name-stays in the area. One day, I went to Uncle Bill's. It was basically kind of like a department type of store. It had everything. Went there with my parents. They went one way. I went another. And I went back in to office supplies, student supply area and there was a mechanical pencil and I didn't have the money to pay for it but I wanted it. And so I looked around. No one was watching and I took the pencil out of the package and I slipped it in my shirt and then I began to make my way out of the store. Now, by definition I was a thief at this point. I almost walked out of the store, made it out of the store thinking that I had been victorious when the cold hands of reality gripped my shoulder. It was a security guard and they led me back into this little room probably no bigger than a broom closet and I remember it all these years later. They had a metal desk with one metal chair and they sat me in it and then they called my parents over the loud speakers of the store. You can't imagine what that feels like to hear "Will Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong please come to the security office". And then imagine what it was like to be setting in that little interrogation room and seeing your mother and your father appear at the doorway. It was a tremendous moment in my life that had made an impact. I will never steal again. I had this indelible impression of that moment placed there for all times. I do not want to be named as a thief. And the scriptures say that shouldn't be a part of our characteristics of Christ followers for this day. We shouldn't acquire anything other than acquiring it righteously. And that's how we understand the text.

But there is a depth to this meaning that does not limit the word stealing or thievery to just taking what is not yours. The scriptures also enlarge the concept of being a thief as one who has something but holds it so tightly themselves and hoards it that they never allow anyone else to experience what they have been given themselves. That is, what the scriptures say also is a form of stealing. Let me help you see that. Look at the text. It says, we're not to be a thief but rather we are to labor. This is the word *kapioto*. It means to work to the point of being weary; work to the point of sweat and exhaustion. So, clearly we're not to take, we're to work for something. And what this work to be? It's to be honest work which means good or productive. We honor God by honoring our employers. When we work with a sense of productivity and we work honorably we honor not only our employers we honor God.

But, why do we work? Here's the key. Look at this. Let the thief no longer steal but, rather let him labor doing honest work with his own hands *so that* – that is a clause. I've talked to you about this before. That's a key when you're reading the scriptures that *so that* is answering a question. It's a question that may not even be evident in the text but the writer is assuming you're tracking. It's like this. Let the thief no longer steal, but

## MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

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rather let him labor doing honest work with his own hands. Why? So that he may have something to share with any one in need. Take a long look at that for a moment. What is this text teaching us? We don't work just so that we can have. We work so we can what? Share. God has given us the ability to work. God has given us the job to work. Not only so that it can meet our own needs; not only can meet our family needs; not only so it can meet our wants but he goes one step further. He's given us so that it could be a way of life for us to share. In other words, we don't work just to get. We work to give. Now, that might be a brand new concept for you because it certainly isn't a modern cultural concept. Our modern, cultural concept is this is my job. This is my wages. It's my earning. It's my income. So it's mine to do with what I want. God comes into your life and says, I'm going to reorient your thinking. I'm going to take off the old and put on the new and one of the new ways of thinking is that what I've given you, I've given you so that you might share. Now why does this not concern us as Christ followers? Why does the first thing that comes into our mind is well, what am I going to do personally? Who's going to take care of me? Why don't we worry about that? I can answer that question by having you turn to the book of Matthew chapter 6. Let Jesus answer it for us.

In Matthew 6 He directly answers that question about our own life. You need to understand that this is a time in Christ's life when many, many people were gathered around him and large crowds were coming to speak to Him. This section of scripture is often referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. Literally, He was sitting on a mountain-type of a hill that had a huge bowl. Thousands of people were coming and gathering to listen to Him and He was speaking directly into their lives. And what was He talking about? Two-thousand years ago he was talking about something that directly influences our life all these years later. Look, he says this in verse 25. I tell you, do not be anxious about your life. Anybody anxious about their life? Hits us still today, all these years later. He says, don't be anxious about your life, what you'll eat, what you'll drink or about your body, what you'll put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? He says, look at the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap. What is that idea of sowing or reaping? That's work, right? He's saying, birds are not out there working. Not only that, they're not out gathering in barns. They don't have a savings account. They don't have something to draw upon. They don't sow or reap. They don't have any type of savings. They don't put something in the barns. Yet, the text says, your Heavenly Father feeds them.

Then, here comes a rhetorical question. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you, by being anxious can add a single hour to a span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field – how they grow; how they never toil or spin. What's that sound like? That's also another reference to work. They don't toil. They don't spin. Yet, I tell you even Solomon in all his glory; by the way, the wealthiest man in scripture; Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these but if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into

## MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: Deconstruction / Reconstruction of the Disciples' Life Part 5

Characteristics of the Reconstructed Life (2)

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Weekend 01.13-14.10

the oven, will He not much more clothe you, Oh you of little faith. Therefore, do not be anxious saying what shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear? For, verse 32, the Gentiles and who are the Gentiles? Ephesians 4:17. We do not walk any longer as the Gentiles. The Gentiles are people who do not know God. So what is Jesus saying? He's saying, for those who do not know God seek after these things, they worry after these things, they're anxious about these things but your Heavenly Father knows that you need them all. And then He tells us what to concentrate on. He says, but, transition, seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you.

He's saying don't be anxious about the things of life. Don't be anxious about you. I'll take care of you. I want you to be pinpoint, laser focused on the Kingdom of God and if you will do that, I will take care of the rest of the your life; the rest of the aspects of your life. Do you hear what He's saying? He's saying, I want to be the defining factor of your life. Give control of all your life to me, including your money.

Now, in Proverbs, chapter 3, verse 9. I want you to write that down. You can look it up later. Proverbs 3:9 says this, honor the Lord with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your produce. Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the first fruits of anything that is given to you. This is a command. What is God saying? He's saying I want you to honor me first with what? With what I've given you. I want you to honor me first with your wealth. Why do we do that? Because He's the one who's given us the ability to make that wealth. What is the greatest way that we could dishonor God with our wealth? It's by being disobedient to him; holding it back; hoarding it; keeping it to ourselves. This is where the scripture says we become like thieves. You see, when we are unwilling to trust God with our money and do with it what He tells us to do we actually fall into a category of being thieves to God. That might seem difficult to fully comprehend so let me show it to you.

You're in the first book of the New Testament. If you start turning left in your bibles you're going to find the last book of the Old Testament which is called Malachi. It's probably about four or five turns of the page. I want you to go there. Malachi chapter 3. God is speaking to the children of Israel through the Prophet Malachi. He's inviting them to come back into an active relationship with Him. What He's saying, you have to come back under my conditions. You have to come back fully obedient. You have to come back allowing me to have control of all your life. You can not rob from me. That would have gotten the people's attention and that's where he starts. Verse 8. He says, will a man rob God? Malachi 3:8. Yet, He says you're robbing me. But you say, how have we robbed you? How have we robbed you God? And God answers. He says, look, he says in the tithe and the contribution.

## MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: Deconstruction / Reconstruction of the Disciples' Life Part 5

Characteristics of the Reconstructed Life (2)

Ephesians 4:28-32

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Weekend 01.13-14.10

Now, just so you understand what these words mean – the word tithe literally means a tenth. That's just what it means. There are two types of giving represented in this passage for the people of Israel. The tithe – that they were called to give a tenth of what they've made and a contribution which was above and beyond the tithe. Your text might say tithe and offering. Those are also words that are correct in understanding. A tithe, and we understand that here. That's something we're called to give a tenth. An offering or contribution is above that for something special. By the way, we illustrate that here. It might be missionary work or Asia's Hope, Adopt A Child. We give above and beyond our tithe. This is where that came from. God says you are robbing me when you don't bring the tithe and the contributions to me. He says, verse 9, you are cursed with a curse for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse. What is the storehouse? It's the place of worship. That there may be food in my house and thereby put me to the test. You ought to underline that in your bible. Do you know why? Because this is the only place in scripture invites His children to test Him. And when you find something in the scripture that's the only place you ought to stop and take good notice. Because God has said repeatedly, Deuteronomy 6:16, do not put the Lord your God to the test. Jesus affirms that in Matthew 4 and Luke 4, do not put the Lord your God to the test. It's repeated over and over in scripture. And yet, Malachi 3, when it comes to our money God says test me. Test me and see what? And see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. Test me. You be obedient like I'm asking, God says, and see if I will not bless you.

Now, immediately you might be thinking, we have to be careful here because we can't apply Old Testament covenant promises to the New Testament and you'd be right. We do not live under the Old Testament covenant. We live under the new covenant of Christ. But does that mean we can not still rob God? No, we can definitely still rob God because you know what the New Testament covenant tells us? That we're no longer under the restrictions but now it's been open wide and we're called to generosity. Part of the characteristics of a Christ follower is that they are generous. They live their lives with open hands knowing that whatever has been given to them is actually been given to them by God and they now want to serve God. And so, what is the New Testament command in this area? Be Generous.

Let me show you that. Let me show you the corresponding New Testament passage of the same principle. 2 Corinthians, chapter 9. 2 Corinthians 9:6. Again, it's important for you to turn there so you can see it with your own eyes. 2 Corinthians 9:6. All throughout we learn we're to be generous. Paul says to Timothy, they, speaking of the believers, are to be good, to be rich in good work and to be generous. Should be what is characteristic of us. 2 Corinthians 9:11, he says you'll be enriched in every way to be generous in every way. This is just model, New Testament understanding of our lifestyle – that we are to be people who are to be generous. Generous, it says, will bring blessing.

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Now, look at verse 6. Paul goes right at it. He says, the point is this, don't miss this. The point is this. Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Stop there. This is a metaphor. Agrarian principle. They would have understood this right away. Few seeds in the ground – you're going to get a few amount of harvest. You put lots of seed in the ground – you're going to get lots of harvest. We understand that. It doesn't take a genius to figure this out. But here's what is interesting is that he uses a metaphor to give us a scriptural principle and the principle comes in verse 7. He says, now each one of you must give as he has made up his mind to. Clearly he has giving on his mind as he's talking about this metaphor of sowing and reaping. He says each of you must give as he's made up his mind. Not reluctantly or under compulsion like the old system, for God loves a cheerful giver. He says, God now loves it when you give generously. And if you want to know how to give, well, if you sow sparingly – you're going to reap sparingly. If you sow bountifully - you're going to reap bountifully. He says, but the promise is still the same. Verse 8. And God is able to make all grace abound to you so that having all sufficiency and all things at all times you may abound in every work. Same concept of promise.

Now, it gets better. Look at verse 10. He says, He, this is God, who supplies to seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. Do you see what this text is saying? Let me unpack it for you. He says God will supply seed to the sower. Who's the sower? We are. Who's supplying the seed? God. What is seed? Money. He's saying, God will supply seed to the sower. He's going to give that to you. He's going to supply it for the bread that you need for your food; for the things that you want; for the thing that sustains life. Not only that but He's going to supply and multiply your seed for what? For sowing to increase your harvest or righteousness. He says, God's going to give you the money to share with others so that it directly impacts your righteousness.

Verse 11. You will be enriched in every way for all your, what does it say? Generosity. You need to be careful here because I'm not talking about some strange prosperity gospel that says, well, if you give one dollar then God's going to give you ten dollars back. Whoever came up with that, if you see that on television – click. Turn the thing off because it's a lie. That's not how this works. I'm not going to stand here and say, will, you know what? Every dollar you give God's going to give you a dollar back or God's going to give you more. That's not what God says. He says I'm going to give you a blessing. He doesn't narrow it to just finances. He says – I'm going to bless you because you're being obedient to me. He says, the real issue is not about your money. It's about control – who's going to be in control of your life.

Now, what's going on inside your heart right now? Really. What's going on? We've been working hard, going through the text, making sure we understand clearly what this

## MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

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Weekend 01.13-14.10

means. Are you leaning in? Are you listening? Is there just a sense of anxiousness to learn; anxious to be obedient? Say, teach me the scriptures so that I might do it. Or are you pushing back and you're saying, you know what? I'm just not ready for that. Are you crossing your arms and you're being resistant because this is not about money. It's about control. God will not be satisfied with part of you. He won't. He's not going to just let you compartmentalize your life and give just part of your life to Him and save the rest for some other time. He wants all of you. He wants you to walk in a manner worthy of your salvation. I have to tell you – your money is an empty well. When you go back to it for needs that are more than just some kind of something you buy or something that you experience, when you find your safety net there, when you find your joy there, when you find fulfillment there it's an empty well that will not satisfy. And God says until you trust me, until you do what I ask of you I can not make you the person that I designed you to be.

Now, you need to know. Your flesh will fight you on this tooth and nail every step of the way. It happens to me. I write out my check. I put it in the envelope. I go to drop it in the black box and momentarily I'm thinking, I could use this for some need of mine or I could save this up and take a vacation or I could buy something that I want. It's a momentary hesitation. Do you know what the scriptures call that? Mark 4 calls that the deceitfulness of riches – that our riches deceive us into thinking that it will give us something that it really will not give. Only obedience will give us what we're truly seeking.

The thing is, when your flesh fights you – you need to remember that the scriptures are clear. Are you willing to routinely, proportionately, sacrificially obey? Or are you going to try to control this part of your life? You're not going to want to release the grip you have on your money. You won't. But, hear this. It is not your money that you're clinging to. It's not. It's the old self. He's taken that off. That's not you anymore. He's given a new view. He's made you into a likeness of Christ. Now let God do a work in you.