

From Stealing to Giving

Ephesians 4:28

Halifax: 30 March 2008

Introduction:

Oh my dear Christian friends, you who are in the Lord Jesus Christ,

- Isn't the Lord's way with us wonderful?
- Each week as we work our way through Ephesians,
 - I want to remind you of the overall flow of this most excellent letter that tells us of God's marvellous way of dealing with His elect...

It tells you that:

- He has chosen you in Christ that you should be holy and without blame before Him...
- He has sent His Son from heaven to pay the penalty of all your sins so you can be completely forgiven...
- And He has made you His very own sons and daughters—has taken you into His very own household to live in His glorious presence forever and ever...
 - To live in the community of perfect love in which He has lived for all eternity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 - At this very moment, He is restoring His image in you so that you can love as He loves...
 - Love as Jesus loves...
 - He is completely making you over into a glorious new creation, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.
 - It is impossible to imagine what it will be like to live in a community where everyone loves each other as our dear Lord Jesus has loved us!
 - Where we ourselves will be done with our selfishness and pride and coolness toward our gracious God and toward each other...
 - Where we will have the reverence and the wondering adoration before our glorious God so that we may admire Him in all His glory...
 - Where there will be no more angry words and no more envy and no more manipulation...
 - At this very moment, dear Christian,
 - your gracious Lord is forming this new life in you—little by little He is transforming you as you go on in His Word,
 - seeking to walk worthy of the calling you have to be His child, to live in His house forever as one who is holy and without blame before Him!
 - He is fitting each of you as stones to live in His house.

And now, in our study of Ephesians,

- we have come to that place where He is describing to us the specific changes that He wants to see in us as His sons and daughters who bear His image...
- You are no longer to walk in the futility of your mind as those who know not Christ do...
 - Indeed, you have heard the voice of Christ—you have heard His call to come to Him for the forgiveness of sin and to obtain an endless life of glory in God’s presence...
 - Things can never be the same for you!
 - Obeying His call, you have completely turned from an empty life to follow Him into this glorious new future that He has secured for you!
 - You have put off the old man and have put on the new man who is being renewed daily.
- And we have seen in particular,
 - that He calls you to replace lying words with speaking the truth to your neighbour... (v. 25)
 - and to transform your anger from that sinful selfish destructive anger to a holy righteous anger that hates evil... (v. 26-27)
 - How excellent it is to become like our heavenly Father!
- And now this week, we come to yet another specific transformation...
 - Ephesians 4:28: “Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.

I. Right from the start, I want you to consider how much this describes the way of our Lord Jesus.

A. He Himself said, “I did not come to be served, but to serve.”

1. Far, far from coming to take—even to take what was rightly His—He came to give.
2. Never was there a person so giving as our Lord Jesus Christ...
 - a. He saw that the whole human race had made themselves odious to God by their sin...
 - We had brought ourselves under God’s holy wrath and curse forever and ever.
 - He saw that we were without hope, completely unable to save ourselves...
 - He saw that we had nothing worthwhile to offer.

- b. But He, who had all the riches and comforts of heaven, laid it all aside to come to redeem us.
 - As we sang in Psalm 132,
 - our David would not give himself rest until He had established a dwelling place for God...
 - David of old was concerned to make a temple with hands for God to dwell in,
 - but our Lord Jesus Christ came to make a temple of living stones—a temple made up of His elect people...
 - He would have no rest until He had done all that we required.
- c. And my friends, how our Lord Jesus laboured for us...
 - 1) For us to be God's dwelling, He had to bear a burden so immense that we could never borne it all...
 - He had to bear the very wrath and curse of God against our sin.
 - All of it!
 - All of our iniquities were laid on Him!
 - By His stripes we are healed!
 - He bore all the pains of Hell for us when He was cut off by His heavenly Father on account of our sin...
 - 2) You see what love He had for us!
 - Such love that He was willing and did bear all of this!
 - He who hated the curse far more than we do bore that curse for our sake.

TRANS> This was His labour for us!

- This is the way He enriched us at His own expense!

B. Now brothers and sisters, this is the One who is the founder of our religion and He did all this for us...

1. How our admiration for Him and our gratitude to Him ought to motivate us to become like Him...
 - To be a kingdom of those who give our life for each other instead of always grasping and taking—stealing!
2. Jesus is the pattern of what we are to be as God's sons...

- We are to love one another as He has loved us...
 - We are to be givers rather than takers...
 - That's what our heavenly Father wants as the way of His household!
 - That is His way and the way of His Son from all eternity.
3. I make this connection to Christ because it is such an obvious one in the overall context of this letter...
- We are concentrating on one verse, but we must not forget the context of the whole epistle where we are told of Christ's great love in giving himself...
 - and told that we are to live differently because we have learned of Him in our conversion.

TRANS> Now let's look more closely at the particular changes that Ephesians 4:28 is calling us to make.

II. You see that the first thing you must do, Christian, is stop stealing.

- Stealing is entirely inappropriate for the Christian.
- A. You will say, "wow, you make it sound like we are all thieves"... telling us that must stop stealing...
1. I say it that way because the language in our translation is a little soft here...
 - a. A more literal translation would be:
 - "Let him who is stealing steal no more..."
 - This shows that Paul was not talking about something that was a past problem for the Ephesians before their conversion.
 - He is talking about a present ongoing problem in those who were now professing godliness.
 - Stealing was, in fact, a problem that the believing Ephesians needed to work on—
 - and it is a problem that we all need to be working on now.
 - b. Do you know that I have stolen from all of you at Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church?
 - I have. You support me and my family for my labour among you as a pastor...
 - And there are times when I have wasted me time—
 - times that I should have been serving you and working for you—
 - or times that I have only partially given myself to the task—

- That is stealing and I have done it.
- I am working on it, but I still have a long way to go.

TRANS> So when I tell you that you need to stop stealing I am not suggesting that you are someone who regularly dons a ski mask and visits banks with pistol in hand,

- or that you are in the habit of stealing cars out of the parking lot at the mall...
- or that you are a shoplifter...

2. There are a lot of other ways to steal, and whatever ways you are doing it need to be changed.

a. You must remember that we are hearing God's Word—it is Christ who is speaking to us here—

- and He has a much higher standard than we do and sees a lot deeper into us than we can even see into ourselves when He tells us not to steal...
- All of our motives and intentions are naked and opened before His eyes so that when you think of stealing before his eyes, you have to examine yourself much more closely...
- And when you do, you will find that there is a lot that is still not right.

b. And you need to remember that from God's perspective, even those little sins are enough to have you expelled from His house forever.

- Yes, you are fully accepted through the cleansing of Jesus Christ,
- but if it were not for that, there is enough thievery in every one of you to cut you off forever.

c. But don't let this discourage you!

- Let it encourage you that God has a lot more changes to make in you before He brings you into your heavenly home.
- He is going to purge you of all your grasping ways.
 - That means that you have a lot to look forward to!
 - You are not stuck with what you are, so you don't need to pretend to be better than you are...
 - God is going to change you—and He is changing you now if you are a true believer.

B. Let me show you some of the ways that we steal...

1. First, we steal when we overcharge—

a. The Bible often speaks of using false weights—

- This refers to the weights that were used in the Bible times for buying and selling—
 - some sellers would carry a set of weights that indicated that there was more of the product they were selling than was actually there.
- b. You use false weights whenever you do not speak honestly about what you are buying or selling...
 - Proverbs 20:14 puts it like this:
 - Pr 20:14: "It is good for nothing," cries the buyer; But when he has gone his way, then he boasts.
 - In other words, he talks about how inferior the product is when he is purchasing it to get a lower price,
 - but then after he purchases it, he boasts about how excellent it is.
 - You may remember the illustration I had a couple of weeks ago with Tim who decided to sell his all terrain vehicle when his mechanic detected that the transmission was starting to fail...
 - When Tim went to sell it, he said nothing to the buyer about this problem.
 - That was using a false weight...
 - He pretended that the ATV was worth more than what he believed so that he might get a better price.
 - That is stealing!
 - This is so easy to slip into!
 - You want to sell something at a good price, so you exaggerate about it a little to make it sound better than it is.
 - That is overcharging and overcharging is stealing.
- 2. A second way of stealing is to underpay...
 - a. Let me ask you, what kind of tip do you leave when you go to a restaurant?
 - Sometimes, when you get the bill, you may not want to leave much of a tip, but as God's children, we should be desirous to do good to our neighbour—and that includes waiters and waitresses...
 - When you give them less than they deserve, you are stealing...
 - b. And what about tax evasion...
 - Do you do work under the table?
 - Do you falsely report your income?

- That's stealing!
- You will say, "but the government is unjust in their taxation and they use the money for things that are unjust..."
 - That may be true, but the Bible tells you to pay your taxes.
 - If the rulers are not what they ought to be, it is God's judgement on us and you have to accept it unless you can lawfully change it.
- c. And what about the person you hire—do you pay him in a timely way?
 - Just talk to any tradesman, and he will tell you how hard it is to get people to pay their bills...
 - When you do not pay on time,
 - it costs him a lot...
 - He has to send out notification which takes time and money, and he may have to pay interest on bills that he can't pay...
 - all because of your selfishness in not paying him on time.
 - This is not loving your neighbour!
 - That is underpaying.
 - That is stealing.
- d. Another way of underpaying is to give less than a full ten percent of all your increase to the church...
 - I'm not even going to get into the details about whether you tithe on your gross or your net—
 - and whether you include your child tax credit and your investment income...
 - I will leave all that for you to work out with the Lord...
 - But you need to know that the Lord has appointed that those He has redeemed give a tenth of their increase to support the worship of Him as our redeemer...
 - The tithe is not something that belongs only to the ceremonial law...
 - Abraham and Jacob both gave tithes to support the worship of God long before Moses was even born...
 - Abraham gave a tithe to Melchizedek the priest, and Jacob used a tenth of all his increase to worship God when God brought him back safely from Laban's house.

- Therefore, when Moses instituted the worship of the tabernacle and appointed priests and Levites who were supported by tithes,
 - He was not instituting the tithe as a new thing, but continuing it.
 - The people brought their tithes to the Lord, and the Lord commanded the tithes to be used to support the priests and Levites...
 - They, as the saying goes, ate from His table—the Lord provided for them through the tithes of the people.
- In the New Testament,
 - The Lord still has His ministers... the ministers of the gospel...
 - And He has commanded that they also should eat at His table—
 - that is, be provided for by the tithes of His redeemed people as the priests and Levites were in the Old Testament times.
 - Paul makes this connection in 1 Cor 9:13-14 when he says:
 - 1 Cor 9:13-14: Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.
 - They are to live the same way the ministers of the Old Covenant lived.
 - The tithe is an obligation put upon believers that continues as long as the public worship of God continues.
 - As you all know, we do not have big campaigns with charts on the wall and promotions to encourage giving...
 - We don't even pass an offering plate around or give out pledge cards.
 - We simply expect that every member,
 - unless providentially hindered,
 - will give at least ten per cent of all his increase to support the work of the church,
 - This is the minimum that God requires.
 - And this, I believe, is what most of you do...
 - It is a testimony of your sincerity that our church is able to pay the bills when we are so small...
 - But if there are any of you who are not tithing,
 - you need to look carefully at what you are doing—

- It may well be that you are living beyond your means, using money that the Lord has called you to use for His church for something else...
- In Malachi, He calls this robbing Him.
 - Mal 3:8-9 says:
 - "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation.

TRANS> Okay, so we have seen that stealing can be by overcharging or by underpaying.

- but that still does not exhaust it...

3. A third way you steal is by destroying other people's property...

a. Vandalism is an obvious example...

- We have all walked through the broken glass when some fool has smashed out the glass in the bus shelter...
- Gina's father told me about a lad he caught at Walmart who came up to a wardrobe, grabbed hold of the top of the door, and pulled down on it so that the hinge broke off.

b. But what about you?

1) Do you treat rental cars or rental property in the same way you treat your own property?

- Do you let the engine run hot because it's just a rental?
- Or do you wear your muddy shoes into the motel room or leave the heat up higher than you would at home?
 - Why do you do it?
 - Is it because you love your neighbour who has to pay the bill and clean up after you?

2) You children, Are you rough with toys that belong to someone else?

- You aren't much of a friend if you are!
 - Do you like it when kids come over to your house and destroy all your toys?
- And how do you treat your own property?
 - Your house belongs to your family—

- Do you bang up the walls and scratch up the floors without regard for the other members of your household?
 - Do you leave things out and lose them, depriving your brothers and sisters and your parents of their use?
 - Do you feel that you are entitled to a twenty minute shower when it costs everyone in the house?
- 3) And all of you... if you see someone's property being threatened, do you do anything about it—as you would for your own?
- In Deuteronomy 22, Moses talks about hiding yourself when you see your neighbour's ox or sheep going astray...
 - or when you see his donkey or ox fall down along the road.
 - In other words, you disappear quickly from the scene so that you won't have to help.
 - I heard about a man in HRM whose house was broken while he was out of town...
 - It was in the middle of winter and the thieves left the door wide opened so that when the man returned,
 - he not only had things stolen out of his house, but on top of that, his pipes had burst and he had a huge power bill.
 - Yes, those thieves were the cause of it all,
 - but where were the neighbours?
 - He lives in a neighbourhood and no one of them bothered to close the man's door!
 - They had a hand in robbing that man themselves!
 - You rob from your neighbour when you do not try to protect what is his—when you do not care for his property
4. A fourth way of stealing is to take support from others when you don't really need it...
- a. A big way this is done in our society is to rely on social assistance when you ought to be working...
- Remember that it is very easy for the government to be generous with other people's money...
 - Davy Crockett was a member of congress, and a farmer once chided him for using money out of the public treasury to support a widow in need...

- Crockett asked the farmer how that could be wrong and the farmer said, “you used money that the people had contributed for other purposes—it was not authorised to be used for that purpose.”
 - Crockett realised that the farmer was right...
 - When a future motion was brought forward to support a family whose house burned down, Crockett objected.
 - He explained the principle he had learned from the farmer and suggested that instead, each member of congress should contribute out of their own resources to help out the family.
 - They agreed, but Crockett later discovered that he alone had contributed...
 - He concluded that it is easy to be merciful with other people’s money, but not so easy with your own!
 - But what is the point?
 - The point is that our government may be willing to support you out of the public treasury when the Lord would have you working to support yourself instead.
 - Just because it is legal does not mean it is right.
 - This is certainly something to think about.
- b. There are a lot of other ways this can be done...
- 1) There are those who get more than what they ought out of insurance claims...
 - 2) There are those ministries and ministers who exaggerate about their needs so as to get more than they ought.
 - 3) There are those who sponge off their parents when they ought to be providing for themselves...
 - 4) There are those who file lawsuits in a day when our legal system is often far too generous to those who claim to have been wronged...
 - Huge sums are paid out for emotional abuse or for pain and suffering.
 - The scriptures require that you make it right when you have damaged your neighbour’s property...
 - or when you have injured him so that he has not been able to work,
 - but there is no allowance for emotional suffering or such things.
 - It is unjust and you should not try to collect it.
5. And fifthly, there is the most obvious form of stealing...

- a. When you simply take something that is not yours—shop lifting, breaking and entering, etc.
 - Gina's father also told me that he was amazed to see all the stealing that goes on at Walmart...
 - and he lives in Yarmouth where it is probably not as bad as in the city.
 - He said they lose several hundred dollars a day...
 - He told about a woman who returned a microwave in a sealed up box, got a full refund for it, and went away...
 - When the box was opened, she had put her old microwave in the box and kept the new one!

- b. Our society has slid more and more deeply into this sin...
 - I was amazed that a couple of commentaries I have that were written in the fifties or sixties spoke of stealing as something that is very common among the heathen...
 - It was a thing that was pretty much unheard of in their day in North America.
 - I am told that during the days of the Great Depression when people were truly hungry,
 - you didn't even need to have a lock on your door!
 - In just a few decades, we have gone from a society where there was almost no stealing to a society where it is a daily occurrence...
 - That is God's judgement on us for thinking we can get along without Him!

- c. But beware, because even this more obvious form of stealing can be done in more subtle ways...
 - for example, you can abuse an expense account...
 - or you can grab a ream of paper or a can of paint from work for personal use.
 - That is stealing too!

TRANS> So you see that we all need to change—we all need to stop stealing in whatever ways we are stealing.

- Stealing is so far from the way of Christ!
 - The Lord calls you to a way that is far better than stealing...

III. He has appointed a way for you to not only provide for yourself, but also for others.

A. He says of the thief, "Let him labour... working with his hands."

1. Note well that the opposite of stealing is not ceasing to steal...
 - It is rather starting to labour so that you are able to give.
 - You have not really changed if you merely stop stealing...
 - You are just a thief between jobs...
 - To change the way God wants, you have to learn to work hard and to give to those in need.
2. The word translated "labour" here is the Greek word *kopiaō* (*kop-ee-ah'-o*) which means "become weary"...
 - a. This word is used in Matthew 11:28 when Jesus says,
 - "Come to me, all you that are **weary** and heavy laden..."
 - And it is used of Jesus Himself when He came to Samaria in John 4:6 where it says:
 - John 4:6: "He was **weary** and sat down to rest..."
 - b. The idea then is that instead of stealing, you are to wear yourself out with labour.
 - Instead of using your hands to take, you are to put them to good honest work.
 - Not the work done *has* to be physical...
 - When it says "with your hands,"
 - It means the work must be done by your own agency...not by somebody else.
 - The hands that once stole are not to be employed in doing good for others.
 - You are to learn to wear yourself out with labour.
 - c. I would again point you to the example of our Lord Jesus Christ...
 - 1) Talk about labouring to the point of exhaustion for others!
 - Even in His day to day ministry, we are told that He went about everywhere doing good.
 - Can you imagine what it would be like if every believer did that?
 - If every believer was willing to wear himself out for others?

- Some of you are blessed with wives and mothers that do that...
 - They wear themselves out for you every day.
 - In heaven, everyone will do that!
 - And this is what He calls us all to do now!
- 2) I tell you, in those places where true Christianity has taken root, it has always led to tremendous prosperity for this very reason...
- Many of our ancestors laboured for future generations...
 - They tamed lands and established governments and fended off enemies and designed tools and did all sorts of other things that we now benefit from...
 - They were doing all this for their neighbours as well as for those who would come after them.
 - How sad it is to see how ungodly we have become in our generation!
 - Instead of laying up treasures for those who come after us, we are running up a tab for them!
 - We keep putting ourselves deeper and deeper into debt, leaving the bill for future generations to pay!
 - This is stealing!
 - This is not Christian—it is not God’s way...
 - God’s way is to weary ourselves in labour for others...
 - Oh that we could become like Jesus in this way!
 - Oh that as believers, we would stand out in our society as those who live for others instead of for ourselves!
- 3) Look at how much Jesus did for us!
- He went all the way to the cross...
 - not for his own sake, but that He might do good for us—the undeserving!
 - That was His way!

B. Brothers and sisters, you need to see from this that labour—even labour that wears you out—is not bad! It is part of a holy life!

1. Labour is a creation ordinance!

a. God appointed labour before the fall—

- He put Adam in the Garden and told him to tend it...
 - And He commanded him to subdue the earth—to make the whole world a garden... to bring into service to his neighbour.
 - You say, “but didn’t God curse labour?”
 - Yes, He did,
 - but you must not think that labour itself is the curse—
 - The curse is that labour is filled with trouble—things don’t go smoothly—we plant corn and we get weeds—or a storm comes and destroys the crop...
 - But labour itself is still a blessing.
 - Those monks and fanatics who think they are being super spiritual because they withdraw from common labour are only deceiving themselves...
 - Christian, you are a priest and your work for others is your offering of service to the Lord.
 - He receives what you do for others as done for Him.
 - You need to see your daily labour as your service to God, performed for His glory.
- b. Just think what a wonderful gift of God labour is!
- You are actually able to make things, arrange things, manage things, transport things—
 - all for your neighbour’s enjoyment and use!
 - You are able to make music for each other, to cook meals for each other, to build houses for each other, to take care of those who are sick...
 - By God’s grace, you are able to be a blessing to others, even as God blesses all His creatures with good things.
 - What a tremendous privilege it is to labour!
 - to have the power to enrich others and to do good for them!
2. Your failure to labour deprives both yourself and others of what you might have provided, had you been diligent.
- a. When you do not work hard at the job you are contracted to do, you are stealing...
- Your employer is paying you and you are not delivering the service you might...

- The clients are deprived of your service,
 - or are given a product of less quality than they might have been given if you had put in more effort.
 - Your family, who might have enjoyed a wonderful meal or a clean house is instead deprived of these things.
 - Children, if it is your job to take out the trash and you don't do it, everyone in your family has to deal with the running over trash can.
- b. And you men, do not be one of those men who is capable of providing well for their households who, because of slackness, does not provide well...
- So many men today even abandon their families!
 - We are all given different gifts and abilities and a man's faithfulness in providing for his family is not measured by how much he provides in comparison to others...
 - but it is measured by how well he provides in relation to his ability and opportunity.
 - If he doesn't get tired at work, he is not doing what the Lord asks for in this passage.
 - The Bible goes so far as to say that a man who will not provide for his household is worse than an unbeliever!
 - so this is not a sin you want to be as far away from as possible.
 - The same is true of you women.
 - If you are tired when you go to bed at night because you have been serving your household or your neighbour through your labours,
 - don't feel sorry for yourself,
 - you have done what is pleasing to God.
- c. But of course this is not to say that providing well is to consume you either...
- 1) There are those men who are so consumed with their career (or their careers) that they do not expend themselves for their families in ways that are also required of them!
 - They come home, not eager to teach the word of God to their household,
 - but tired and grumpy and unwilling to expend themselves any further...
 - 2) Or they are gone all the time for the sake of gain and wholly neglect the spiritual nurture of their children...

- they do not talk to them or help them or work with them to teach them.
- They do not lead them in family worship, instructing them from the scriptures.
- They do not involve themselves in the discipline and nurture of their children as God commands.

3) Or, if they don't have any children,

- They do not serve in the church where they might,
 - They do not visit the sick or the prisoner...
 - They do not help the elderly or reach out to the lost...
- They sit around and watch movies or spend endless hours on the internet or at their hobbies.

C. Now this scripture supposes that when you labour to the point of exhaustion, you will have enough for yourself and for giving to others who have need...

1. The goal is to labour so that you not only provide for yourself, but also have something to give to the needy.

- Some Christians think that if they tithe, then they have given, but tithing is not giving—it is meeting an obligation you have...
 - Giving is what you do for those in need beyond tithing.
 - The famous section on giving in 2 Cor 8 & 9 is not about tithing...
 - It is about a special collection that was taken up among the Gentiles for the poor in Jerusalem—who had suffered persecution because of the gospel.
- Understand also that giving does not necessarily have to be money...
 - You can help someone repair a leaky roof,
 - You can repair their car for them when they are unable to do it themselves and cannot afford to take it to the mechanic,
 - You can open your home to welcome a stranger,
 - or extend hospitality to a student...
 - You can lend your tools to someone or give them a ride somewhere.
 - Or even give them work to do not so much because you need the work done, but because they need the work.

2. Notice all this is to be done to someone who is in need... it is supposed to help the person...

- a. The Bible actually teaches that you are not give to those who perfectly able to work and will not work.
 - In 2 Thes 3:10 it says:
 - “If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.”
 - That is a command and you are to obey it.
 - Instead of feeling guilty that you did not give a beggar anything who is perfectly fit to work...
 - you should feel guilty when you do give him something!
 - Such a person’s greatest need is not to eat, it is to work!
 - And if you give him something to eat when he refuses to work, you can be sure that he will never learn to work!
 - b. A person in need is one who is sick or injured or aged and who cannot therefore provide for himself...
 - Or perhaps someone who has lost a job and cannot find another one right away...
 - or one who has had a crisis in his family—sickness or damage to his property—
 - you are to be there to help him out.
 - The Lord Jesus, poor as he was, regularly gave to the poor.
 - We can deduce this because when he sent Judas out the words “What you do, do quickly”
 - The disciples thought he must have been sending Judas out to give something to the poor, for Judas was the treasurer.
 - That shows how often our Lord gave.
 - What a great encouragement it is to those in need when you come along and help them out!
3. The bottom line is that your whole life is to be characterised by doing for others!
 - a. And don’t think that none of this counts unless it is done for strangers...
 - There are a lot of you in this congregation are wearing yourself out serving your children every day...
 - God is pleased as you grow more and more into that service, becoming more and more like Christ in your home.
 - Realise that your children are your nearest neighbours—and you are to give yourself for them first—

- then to others as you have opportunity.
- b. There is this funny perversion in which service is often seen as what is done for strangers...
 - There are those who have a great reputation for serving in the community who neglect their own household...
 - That is not what this passage is calling you to do.
 - Your service begins with those who are near and then it extends on out to others as there is opportunity.

Conclusion...

Oh Christian, don't be discouraged when you see all the changes that need to come...

- The Lord Jesus is working in you—
 - He is teaching you to live the way He lives—
 - He is renewing you into His image.
 - Don't you see how you have changed already?
 - Don't you see how you are learning more and more:
 - to consider the needs of others as more important than your own...
 - to give your life for others the way Jesus gave His life for you.
- He is going to complete His work in you...
 - He is going to make you just as gracious and loving and generous as He is.
 - You can't change yourself, but He can do it!
- And any of you who are not trusting in Jesus—any of you who have not given yourself to Him...
 - Isn't it about time you did?
 - What? Do you think you can somehow save yourself?
 - Or do you think you don't need His grace for the pardon of your sin and for the transformation of your life?
 - Of course you do...
 - You can't save yourself—come to Jesus and He will save you.