

If Paul's letter to the Ephesians came with a table of contents you would see that it has a gospel structure. The structure of the letter tells us an important lesson. The first half of the book tell us what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, he has adopted us in love, made us part of his household, blessed us with every spiritual blessing, made us one with Christ as his church. The second part of the letter tells us how we should then live as the adopted loved, blessed church united to Christ. In other words the structure of the letter tells us that our Christian life, our Christian behavior is not something we do to become the loved, blessed, adopted children of God and church of Christ. Our Christian behavior is something that flows out of the fact that we are by grace through faith already loved, blessed, adopted, cherished as the children of God and the church of Christ. The good news is not that I act in a certain way and therefore God loves me. The good news is the God loves me by grace through faith in Christ, and therefore I act in a certain way. It is not that if I behave in a certain way I will become a member of God's family, it is that when God makes you part of his family, then you go out and behave a certain way.

Think of what happens when someone married into the royal family of England. Meghan Markle just married Prince Harry. She has become part of the royal family with all the privileges that such a family entails. And now that she is a member of the royal family Ms Markle, who is now a Duchess, needs to adapt her behavior to reflect that reality. It is not that she needs to act in a certain way to become royalty; it is that she needs to learn to act in a certain way because she is royalty.

That is Paul's point in Ephesians 4: 22 where Paul tells us to put off our old self, which belongs to our former manner of life, and put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. His point is that we must now live according to our new identity, according to the new self, the new you now that you are a royal. As members of the household of God we must learn to live like a prince or a princess in the kingdom of God. A lot of the Christian life is learning to live like the person you have now are by grace through faith in Christ.

In Ephesians 4 Paul gives a couple of different examples of behavior that must change now that we are God's own children. Ephesians 4:28 says this: *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.*

So stealing is an inappropriate behavior for a child of God, it is unbecoming of a member of God's royal household. Instead, we should adopt a new behavior, what we ought to do now that we have been saved by grace through faith is work hard so we can be generous to those in need. So don't steal; stealing is inappropriate for a child of God. Don't cheat on your taxes, don't work under the table, don't illegally download movies or music, tell the cashier when they forget to charge you for something so you don't steal from the store, don't steal from your boss by being lazy at work, don't share Costco memberships when you know are not supposed to, don't lie about the age of your kids just to get a cheaper meal at the restaurant. Don't steal, that is not how you act when you are members of the household of King Jesus.

Imagine if they caught Prince Harry and Duchess Megan stealing. It would be

scandal; it would be all over the news, because that is not how royalty should act. Well, if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are Christian royalty, heirs of the kingdom of God; and so you should not steal either.

Instead of thinking how you can, by hook or by crook, keep more money in your pocket; you ought to as a Christian think about how you can work hard so you can give to those in need. The Heidelberg Catechism uses Ephesians 4:28 as a proof text for the 8th commandment (you shall not steal). In other words, you might be real honest and never technically steal from anyone, but unless you work hard to give your money to those in need, you are guilty of breaking the 8th commandment. In Luke 3:11 Jesus said the following: *Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none. One early church theologian said it like this: When someone steals another's clothes, we call them a thief. Should we not give the same name to one who could clothe the naked and does not?*

Becoming a Christian requires a shift in mindset. When Megan Markle married into the royal family she gave up a life of acting and modeling for a life of service and charity. When you become a Christian you give up a life that is all about you and your toys, and instead you take on a life of service and charity, you work hard so you can bless others and help the poor.

This is very difficult, because we live in a culture that teaches us to overestimate our own needs and ignore those of others. Western culture teaches us to be materialistic and we become so convinced that we deserve this or that and that we won't be happy without it. So you really have to examine your life here and not get sucked into worldly thinking.

In 2 Corinthians 8: 9 Paul encourages us to be generous with these words: *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.* Jesus gave up the riches of heaven to become poor, and Jesus worked hard to help us in our need, and through him we are now rich in Christ. And now that we are in Christ, we are called to do the same. Jesus himself said: *Do not store for yourselves treasures on the earth, but store up treasures in heaven.* He wasn't kidding. So get rid of that old way of life where your pay cheque and resources are all about you. Resist our culture of consumption, put on the new man, act as the child of God that you are, work hard and work honestly to give to the poor.

But remember the gospel structure of the letter to the Ephesians! The good news is not that I act in a certain way and therefore God loves me. The good news is the God loves me by grace through faith in Christ, and therefore I act in a certain way. Don't get that mixed up! Remember first of all what God has done for those who trust the Lord Jesus Christ for their life and their death. He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing, loved us so much he died for us, adopted us as his children in to his royal family, his church. We have become princes and princesses in the kingdom of God. So go and live out of the new identity. *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.* Thank you for listening, until next week the Lord willing ☺