

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

Vol. XXIII

September 22, 2013

No. 38

Change of Behavior

(Jerry Fite)

Paul writes, “*Let him that stole, steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have whereof to give to him that hath need*” (Ephesians 4:28). Behavior is one’s external conduct or action with respect to propriety or morals.

A person may steal in order to support an addiction to drugs. The quick fix to ease the cravings may be a priority moving one to steal in order to obtain quick cash. Any sense of right or wrong takes a back seat to the driving desire to satisfy urgent cravings. Meeting immediate need by any means is the propriety governing the action of stealing. Another governed by a strong sense of right and wrong may realize their drug addiction needs correcting. Instead of stealing, they seek help to properly deal with their drug addiction. Their behavior is different from the thief due to a moral standard or a standard they believe is proper.

Paul instructs the thief to not steal any longer in the context of first establishing a standard governing a new mindset. The thief having been driven by lust, must now put away such a “*former manner of life*” that “*waxeth corrupt after the lusts of deceit*” (Ephesians 4:22). There is no mental vacuum. A new mindset and standard directs behavior. One is to “*be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, that after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth*” (Ephesians 4:23-24).

Paul does not say to the thief just quick stealing and go work thinking that mere will power should be adequate for the change; but he exhorts change of behavior based upon the desire to live holy before God according to His true standard of righteousness, the gospel of Christ (*cf. Romans 1:17, I Peter 3:13-16*).

With a new mind set in being a “learner” or “follower” of Christ (Ephesians 4:20-21), one is ready to change behavior. The liar is to quite lying and start

speaking the truth (Ephesians 4:25). The foul and corrupt mouth, is to change behavior speaking edifying words (Ephesians 4:29). Why the change in behavior? One is behaving according to a new recognized standard.

This is the same process in changing sexual behavior. Paul places the behavior of thieves and drunks in the same context of sexual immorality (I Corinthians 6:9-10). In Corinth there were thieves, drunkards and homosexuals who changed their behavior. “*And such were some of you: but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God*” (I Corinthians 6:11).

Finally consider this behavior change: the Christian does not merely work to obtain things legally; the Christian works to give to the needy. Yes, we work to support our own, and avoid being a parasite and busybody; but we also work to give to those who are in need along the way. We work to give, not just obtain!