

RESTRICTING YOUR USE OF THINGS

When They Hinder Your Expression of Love and Kindness to Others

- **katachraomai** - to use fully (1 Corinthians 7:31, 9:18)
 - **chraomai** - to take for one's use; to use (1 Corinthians 7:31; 9:12,15; other verses exist, but are not applicable to this study)
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[These words do not focus on making oneself "useful," but on "using" things. I have included these two passages because they deal with attitudes. If we don't become consumed with "using" the things mentioned in the following verses, we will find ourselves more free to focus on being "useful"! If our focus is not on ourselves, our circumstances, etc., we will be more able to focus on our love to others: expressing kindness in good and useful ways. One of the passages describes an obligation; the other is a recommendation (at least for certain circumstances), rather than a mandatory action.]

1 Corinthians 7:31

The primary focus in this chapter is on the issue of whether or not a person should marry. And Paul answers this question by telling us that marriage is an acceptable alternative. However, the one who is able to remain unmarried (avoiding sexual sin, of course) will be able to have a more intense focus on the kingdom of God - and this is the more desirable choice.

In addition to this answer, Paul also gives us some basic, general principles that apply to all the circumstances of life: We should make it our goal to live in peace and with contentment in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. It is acceptable for us to make changes to better circumstances, when the opportunity is present, but our primary focus should be on obeying God (v. 15, 17-24).

Our primary focal point should not be on having a family, on circumstances (whether pleasant or unpleasant), on the abundance of possessions, or on the enjoyment of the things of this world. We need to remember that all the things of this present world are temporary, and we need to focus on what is eternal. (v. 29-31) In the context of this specific study, Paul warns us (v. 31) that those who "use" (chraomai) the things of the world should not focus on "fully using" ("being engrossed in" - NIV translation) them (katachraomai). This is essentially the

same thing Jesus taught us, when he said that we cannot serve two masters! (Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13)

[Note: Some restrict the application of this passage just to the Christians at Corinth. They say that it has no relevance for people today. Yet nothing in the context requires us to reach that conclusion. Furthermore, the principles stated here are fully compatible with what Scripture teaches elsewhere.]

1 Corinthians 9:12,15,18

Those who faithfully teach the Word of God are working for us. They are doing us a great service, and we will benefit and prosper eternally because of their labor. This being the case, is it too much for us to provide for their physical needs, while they live on this earth? In Scripture, God says that even *animals* who work for us should be "paid"! (Deuteronomy 25:4, quoted in 1 Corinthians 9:9 and 1 Timothy 5:18) How much more should those who show us the way to eternal life! They have a right to it; we do *not* have a right to refuse it.

However... there may also be circumstances in which they choose to *not use their rights*. They may conclude that they can accomplish more for the cause of Christ if they preach the gospel "without charge." In this chapter, Paul shows that he has the right to receive support from the Corinthians. He has his rights, just as the Corinthians had theirs (see chapter 8). But does that mean he must go parading about, demanding his rights? He knows he has rights... but he also has love!

It seems, in chapter 8, that the Corinthians were willing to trample and destroy others, in order to exercise their own rights. Paul had to remind them that they have *no right* to destroy others - they must build them up, instead. And in chapter 9, he showed that he "practiced what he preached," when he refused to receive financial support from them. Though he had every right to do so, he chose rather to give them the gospel "free of charge," in order that the effects of the gospel would not be hindered in their lives. More than that, he chose to give up *every* right he had, for their sake - choosing to focus on love, rather than on self. Isn't this the very essence of biblical Christianity? Once God changes your heart, that change reflects itself in a change in your attitude toward self and toward others.

It should be noted that there were other apostles and leaders who *did* receive financial support (see the early part of chapter 9). Paul did not condemn them for doing so. Yet in his own circumstances, it would have been detrimental to the Corinthians for him to do so. And this would not have been an expression of love! Note also that even when leaders do not exercise their rights of material support from us, we still have an obligation to "pay" them in other ways. For instance, we owe them the "payment" of honor, in proportion to how well they perform their duties (1 Timothy 5:17-18).

[Note: To better understand this issue, study the context of these chapters. Refraining from the expression of "rights" in this context (so that we do not destroy others) is *not* the same as

yielding to the demands of "legalistic Pharisees" whose purpose is simply to enslave us with a bunch of restrictions. For the first group, Paul always gave-up his rights; for the other group, he *never* did. (Acts 15, Galatians and Colossians provide examples of this second group.) For the first group, our actions can cause them to sin; for the second group, they are sinful and warped regardless of our actions.]

TO THINK ABOUT:

Look around you. Which things are temporary? Which are eternal? Where is your focus? Are you absorbed with things that do *not* have lasting value? Many people *claim* to value Christ and his kingdom... but what values do you *live*? (Empty claims do not prove a change in heart... or demonstrate the reality of one's salvation.)

You may need to spend some time examining the values taught by Scripture. Making them a part of your life is a life-long process. But if the Spirit of God is in you, change will occur. If the love of Christ is in you, it will manifest itself in some way. (Of course, if there is no evidence of life, at least you know where you need to begin: you need to turn to God for salvation.)

How does love manifest itself in one's use of rights? We live in a world in which everyone demands their rights... and they are willing to knock down anyone who is in their way, to get them. Are you different? To what extent do you let the effect you have on others influence your actions - so that others are built-up rather than torn-down? Are there areas in your life, in which the exercise of rights would be incompatible with love and kindness? How do you respond in those areas?

Think about the things mentioned in 1 Corinthians 8-9... about Paul's willingness to become a "slave" to everyone (9:19-23)... and about his ultimate goal in everything he does (9:24-27). Think about ways that these principles apply to your life.

ASSIGNMENT:

You will have opportunity to make choices which reflect your values. As you do so, think about the values being reflected. If they are not a reflection of Christ's love, how can you change your choices?

If "putting God and others first" seems like an empty burden to you, you may need to first focus on your relationship with God. You may need to think about what repentance and salvation is all about. [Even Christians need to remind themselves about these things, at times. This is what the apostle Peter thought, when he reminded his readers about things they already knew - see 2 Peter 1:12-15.]