

## MY RIGHTS

... are they wrong?  
1 Corinthians 9  
WEFC April 18, 2010

That which we talk about today, you do not need to do. You can listen to it and say, "That was interesting", not put it into practice and God will not hold it against you ... honest.

This is optional: it is ...

- high risk
- high trust
- publically criticized
- deeply disturbing
- brain racking
- labor intensive

... but incredibly profitable and rewarding.

What would you think of a person who worked 40 hours a week on a job and when it came payday, refused to take their pay?

They put in the hours, did exceptional work, appreciated by their co-workers, but would refuse their wages?

... our first comment; "If you don't want the money, pass it onto me. I'll gladly take it."

The Los Angeles Times (12/15/96) reported that David Suna and John Tu sold 80% of their company, Kingston Technology Corp., the world's largest manufacturer of computer memory products, for \$1.5 billion dollars.

The two men decided to share their windfall with their employees. The average bonus payment their workers received was just over \$75,000. Sun summarized their decision: "To share our success with everybody is the most joy we can have."

That kind of behavior gets our attention because it is so out of the ordinary, difficult to imitate ... rather scarce that we dismiss it as even being realistic.

Last week as we looked through **1 Corinthians 8** the statement was made:

**Intentionally limiting ourselves to another person's inferior standards is a wise use of our lives.**

You listened politely ... but my suspicion is that most of us, after thinking about it, would probably say, "No thanks. I don't think I am going to change the way I handle things, drop a few notches down to accommodate a person who is a bit slow in getting it. I like my life the way it is."

We do not appreciate dialing down our lives for others.

That's what the writer had asked of the folks ... and so, true to form, the people weren't going to get put in the corner and so they did what we would do.

"Hey, you asked us to turn down our lives for others; that's nice to ask. But what about you? What have you done? Where have you limited your life for others?"

... a fair question ... and a “killer” question because we are always good at telling others what to do though we are not as good at taking our own advice.

Well, this case was different, very different, so different that it is good for us to take the time to examine what he did ... and even though it is optional, to maybe let some of it bang around in our minds.

This person explains that he wasn't just telling them to do something “way out there”, but that he, himself, was doing the very thing he had asked of them ... he was giving up the right to hold on to his freedoms.

**1 Corinthians 9** puts it this way:

*Key Thought:*

**We forfeit our rights to the degree that we are “gripped” by reality.**

We do not forfeit our rights quickly or easily.

There has to be a very good reason, a “gripping” reality for us to do something as drastic as working and deciding not to take our wages for the hours we have put in.

What would it take to get us to act like that?

We are not playing with words here. Nor is this an attempt to be deceptive.

### **1. Our “rights” are full “rights” 9:1-14**

There are times we claim privileges that come with a position or status that we have not reached ... but we like the perks.

That was not the situation here.

The person was legitimately the real thing ... and the rights that came with his position were legitimate.

### **- the “rights” are real 4-6**

Three things were brought out, with the last one being the main point for the discussion.

Followers of Christ ... do they have the right to ...

- receive food and drink from their work?
- get married?
- receive a wage from their work?

These are basic rights.

... of course they are real! No one would question that!

### **- the “rights” are legitimate 7-14**

To make sure that we are not covering anything up, pretending, twisting words, 5 reasons are put forward to see that the right of getting paid for one's work is definitely legitimate.

## **5 reasons why pay for work is legitimate ... just in case you were wondering.**

### **1. Society's norm 7**

Whether it is a soldier, fruit-grower, or shepherd ... or we could add an I T person, teacher, shipper, secretary, nurse, sales associate ... if you work ... you get paid.

Everybody knows that.

### **2. Biblical standard 8-10**

If you work, you have a right to get paid.

### **3. If you have benefited from another's efforts, then show it tangibly 11-12**

When people do good for us and we are enriched by their work, then we should enrich them back.

### **4. Religious precedent 13**

In the Old Testament, when people made offering, those working at the temple were "paid" through being given a part of that offering.

### **5. Jesus' word 14**

The Leader, the Founder, the One who is Head of God's people, Himself, Jesus, stated that those who fulltime work for Him, have the right to be pay for their work.

The right to receive money for work, specifically God's work, is unquestioned.

... so just in case you thought you could stop paying your church staff, please understand that there is legitimate reason for paying us ... phewwww ...

### Transition:

This is the norm.

If you work, you have the right to expect being paid.

This is a legitimate right.

This is a real right.

If we worked and didn't get paid, the world would be in a real mess.

BUT, let's get a "new take" on our constitutional "rights", on what everyone can expect and deserves.

### **2. We do not "need" to cash-in on our "rights" 12,15-18**

9:12

**If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more?**

**But we did not use this right.**

9:15

**But I have not used any of these rights.**

It is quite okay to NOT use our rights.

It is strange, different, not at all the norm, but it can be done ... but for what reasons one would want to do this ... who knows?

Here is what is being said:

The normal person would say,  
"I work, I get paid ... Amen! Hallelujah!"

The person who chooses to not get paid for their work says,  
"I work, I don't get paid ... This stinks!

... no, this person says, "Amen! Hallelujah!"

We scratch our heads and say, "I guess you could do that, but why on earth would you not take what is legitimately yours?"

- We do not cash-in on our "rights" **when we get a good understanding of ourselves in God's "big picture"**

**- living with who I am**

This person was a follower of Jesus Christ, first and foremost.

Paul was also an **apostle** (1).

If we wanted to translate that into our common way of speaking, would mean something like ... This is a big-shot. This is a position with pull. Here is a person of influence.

**- living with what I do**

Here is what the big-wig understands about what he is to do, how he is to live.

17

**I am simply discharging the trust committed to me.**

He is talking about his responsibility and is referring to a "stewardship"

A **steward** ... usually a slave has no rights, no rewards, just responsibilities.

He had no right to a pay.

19

**Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone**

Here we get it in plain, unmistakable black and white. He was to do the work of a **slave**.

**Here is a big-wig, acting like a small-wig.**

What's he hiding? What's he up to?

This isn't normal! We smell a rat around here.

16-18

**Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! ... if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me.**

**If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; 18What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it.**

Take it either way:

**If I do this under orders** (compulsion) ... I am doing what I am supposed to do – and slaves don't get paid.

It was God Himself who selected Paul for this responsibility.

**If I do this voluntarily** ... and don't take a pay, my reward is that I do this free of charge. I do it because I want to do, because it is so important to do.

Who am I?

Why am I here?

What am I to do?

I can see myself as a volunteer ... not charging for my work.

I can see myself as a steward ... carrying out the orders of my boss.

I can see myself as a slave ... serving people as slaves do ... without pay.

A slave? ... explain ...

19-23

... I make myself a slave to everyone ...

**To the Jews I became like a Jew ...**

**To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) ...**

**To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) ...**

**To the weak I became weak ...**

However you would like to put it, using my "freedom", using my "rights" ... I have chosen to be not the big-wig, but a slave to all people.

That's the way I approach things.

When little Wilhelmina was crowned queen of Holland, the happy child was too young to realize the gravity and importance of the occasion. She was overwhelmed by the sights and sounds of the festivities. As thousands cheered when they saw her, she wondered what it involved on her part. "Mama," she asked, "does this mean that all these people belong to me?"

Smiling, her mother shook her head and replied, "No, dear child; it means you belong to all these people."

Transition:

The obvious question is, “Why?”

What got into your head?

Why this “extreme” stance?

We’ve skipped over it most times, but we see it some

**12 ... we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.**

**19 I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.**

**20 ... to win the Jews.**

**... to win those under the law.**

**21 ... to win those not having the law.**

**22 ... to win the weak.**

**I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.**

**3. The reality: It’s Jesus or it’s nothing, so don’t get lost in all the other complicating possibilities**

One thing was clear: Either people find out who God is, are drawn by Him, and accept him ... and they are “saved”, or they do not find Jesus Christ and are lost for all eternity.

Jesus – on Him our life hinges.

**The critical point – our response to Jesus.**

So great is God’s work in Jesus, so effective, so liberating, so powerful ... that, literally, He alone is humanity’s hope.

It is not Jesus and something or someone else.

It is Jesus alone.

Understanding as a Christ-follower just how important it is to get others to see who Jesus is, everything else was focused on this one thing.

What do I need to do to get people to see who Jesus is?

How do we win all the various kinds of people that are out there.

We do whatever it takes, within godly boundaries, to get them to see Jesus.

We learn to strain out the non-essentials, and keep one thing clear – can they see Jesus in me?

It was not that Paul was insincere, or without principle.

On moral issues and biblical principles, Paul did not give an inch. But on personal rights, Paul knew that it was not worth using his rights, his freedoms and in the process turning off a person from Jesus.

He so loved and cared for people who had different skin color, intellectual status, religious elitism, or personal preferences or

desires ... not letting it get in the way of putting Jesus accurately out there.

He was “gripped” by the reality of eternity ... that it lasted so long ...

He began to see just how many people there were around him who did not personally live in a right relationship with Jesus Christ.

He went to bed at night, confident that he was right with God, but it bothered him that those around him went to bed and maybe never even knew that there was a God, who sent His Son to save them

He was fully taken by Jesus ... that He could so completely forgive and transform a person who had blown it ...

He understood that his “rights”, his “blessings” could become hindrances.

There came a redefining of “freedom” or “rights”.

**Before ...**

**Freedom or Rights** meant:

- **using what I am truly entitled to for my benefit.**

**Now ...**

- **choosing NOT to exercise my right to use my God-approved benefits, so that a potential barrier that might blur Jesus Christ’s reality, is removed.**

This is a no-brainer ...

Not long after we moved [into our first house in California], my wife, Janie, and I picked up on the tension between a couple of neighbors. One was a very outspoken churchgoer, while the other was an unbeliever. I knew I was in the hot seat when the unchurched man struck up a conversation with me as we were both working in our yards.

"Say, Steve, aren't you a pastor?" It seems implicit in the public's understanding that pastors exist to serve as referees in times of conflict, so I reluctantly listened as this troubled man opened up about the neighbor he'd never understood. He unfolded a long history of numerous conflicts over small issues. ...

Then he looked up and sighed, "But the most recent problem takes the cake. We received a letter from his attorney threatening to sue us if we don't trim a tree that borders his yard. It seems strange he didn't just come over and ask me to take care of the tree before he went to his attorney." ...

With a little wink, this streetwise unchurched man continued, "You know, I was getting ready to trim that tree, but now there's no way I'm going to do anything until he forces me. I will gladly go to court just so I can have a story to tell about being sued by Christians over an orange tree." He summarized his thoughts with a haunting observation: "I guess sometimes Christians love us—they just don't *like* us."

*Steve Sjogren, Changing the World Through Kindness (Regal, 2005), pp. 103-104*

Today that means ... when my neighbor’s doggeth runneth on my lawn and doeth his business therewith, I shall make it my business to not become upsetteth, but will recognize the vast difference between a patch of dead grass and a person eternally dead.

Therewith, I shall give up my rights to a green lawn for a patchwork lawn, in order that I may live and speak to my neighbor about Jesus ... even if he hath a dumb doggeth that is on the loose.

I will demonstrateth to my neighbor that I both love and like him ... even if he hath a dumb doggeth that is on the loose.

It may mean ...

- paying bills for damage you did not cause
- weeping for sorrows other than your own
- doing work for those who are lazy
- caring for those who don't care for you
- cleaning up messes we did not make

23

**I do become ALL things to ALL men so that by ALL possible means I might save SOME.**

This sets us free to love everyone.

It means that we can serve without prejudice.

We have the right to give up personal ambitions.

We are at liberty to make commitments that make life harder for ourselves, but which are better for the clarity of the Good News in Jesus Christ.

For almost 10 years, Adam Bruckner, [assistant coach for the Philadelphia Kixx indoor soccer team], has made it his personal mission to help the homeless. Actually, "help" would be an understatement for what he does. Although he earns a modest income, he gives away practically everything. And when he decided that wasn't enough, he whittled his living expenses down to two items: gas for his car and food.

All so he could give still more to those less fortunate.

If you label what Bruckner does extraordinary, he'll look at you as if your head were on sideways. He considers his work his calling.

Bruckner was raised in a typical, middle-class American family. He was a high school jock, and by his own admission, far from a saint. He participated in pranks, drank, and played hard, to the point of earning an athletic scholarship to the University of Wisconsin at Green Bay. After graduation, which he skipped, he went on a road trip to try out for a soccer team in Lafayette, Louisiana. When he didn't make the team, he tried out for teams in Pensacola, Buffalo, New York, Sacramento, and Portland. But it wasn't until he reached Philadelphia that he found a team that needed him.

Though chasing his dream meant taking buses, hitchhiking, staying in cheap hotels, and sleeping on couches in friends' homes, the difficulties weren't lost on Bruckner, who learned many of the hardships of being homeless along the way. So when someone approached him about turning his life over to Christ, something stirred inside him.

After he reached Philadelphia, he opened a Bible and prayed for guidance for his life. That's when it hit him: Walking by faith wasn't about burning bushes and moving mountains. It was about living God's Word and doing things for people less fortunate than yourself. "There was nothing planned about it," Bruckner explains. "It just sort of happened. I've always had a heart for homeless people, and one day I decided to hand out sandwiches to anyone who was hungry. It grew from there. ...

"There are a lot of people who believe that the homeless are lazy," Bruckner said. "But a lot of people are unable to help themselves because they might not have the money to get an ID or some other type of document that will help them get a job. I've written a lot of checks to guys so they could get a driver's license and find truck-driving jobs. It's that easy."

So along with his carload of sandwiches and other food, Bruckner brings several checkbooks on his weekly trips to the park. He's painfully aware of scam artists and doesn't hand out checks indiscriminately. Instead, he makes out the checks to the agencies that provide the services the homeless people need but cannot afford.

At first, Bruckner gave away small amounts of money. Fifty dollars here. Seventy-five dollars there. But before long, he'd seriously depleted his bank account. In desperation he called his parents for the first time to ask for money. They covered what he needed.

Today, he's written more than 2,000 checks for a wide variety of purposes, and money issues are almost always looming. Though he continues his attempts to get the city involved, so far he's been unsuccessful. In the meantime, he's started fundraising. The program, called "Philly Restart," collects cash and items that can be sold for at least 10 dollars, donating the proceeds to Bruckner's efforts.

Despite winning several humanitarian awards for his work, Bruckner still considers his project in its infancy. "I've spent more than what I have," he explains, "but I've learned to trust the Lord in everything. He'll never lead us where we can't follow, and he won't give us anything to do that we can't handle. And if we need help from him, all we have to do is ask. I'm living proof of that."

*Michael W. Michelsen Jr. "A Heart for the Homeless," Today's Christian.com (2-9-09)*

## ... getting this to work; ... what it takes

*Key Thought:*

**We forfeit our rights to the degree that we are "gripped" by reality.**

**What we do with our freedom is a clue to our character.**

Let's be clear ... Giving up our freedoms, our rights, is not required of us ... not even by God.

... BUT there is benefit in so doing.

... BUT the price tag is rather high.

... BUT maybe you want to know what it takes to live like this, being a big-wig who is slave for Christ's sake.

## **24-27**

**Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.**

**Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.**

**Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.**

To become this kind of person takes **SELF-DISCIPLINE**.

Recall what we read earlier?

**12 ... we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.**

In competitions only one person gets the prize. But in spite of that fact, the athletes train and work hard ... knowing that only one of them is going to be first.

They work hard to get a wilting piece of plant ... that crown.

We are in a race of sorts as well.

But there are some big differences.

There can be more than one winner. We can all win in this "race".

Further, our reward will not wither up and die. It will last for all eternity,

So what does it take?

**Self-discipline ... self-control ... even for the big-wig apostle.**

He ... and we ... if we go this route will need to grab ourselves by the scruff of the neck and say, "No" to many things with which we are not comfortable or are not to our tastes.

But we recognize that though they are not our flavor, we will put up with them if we can see it working out in the end for the purpose of seeing a fellow believer grow ... or a friend coming to Jesus Christ.

**We all would like to live in the dream world where we get the rewards of accomplishment without paying the price of personal discipline.**

It doesn't happen.

**One of our greatest threats to effectiveness is our desires.**  
That is why we examine our lives and keep it in check.

What we want and desire, even if it is good and legitimate, takes us out of the competition.

To win, athletes who train, cut out of their lives that which does not build into them those skills, those attitudes, that behavior that keeps them from their goal.

We will need to simplify life ... in many ways.

We live with so much clutter ... with so many things on the go ... we are so busy ... doing what is good and necessary ... attempting to run the race ... juggling to many things.

Expect criticism ... people will wonder what's got into you?

They will be suspicious.

**... but remember who you are.**

**... remember what matters.**

**... let reality ... let the longness of eternity, the indefiniteness of time, the value of a person redeem, sink deep into your bones.**

**It is easier to celebrate “the theology of servanthood” than it is to be a servant.**

“The only thing wrong with being a servant is that everyone treats you as a servant.”

... markers that help us get a good reading on where we are at.

**1. If, when we give up an activity, a freedom, we feel like we are losing something important, than we are still far more attached to our rights than we are to reaching people for Christ.**

**2.. Are we convinced that there even is a prize at the end of the work?**

Our answer is not in our reply, but in how we spend our money, what we do with our time, the way we treat people.

If eternity is not real, if it has not gripped us, then why would we give up our freedoms? Why would we want to lose out?

Heaven is a rather amazing place. The rewards of heaven are fantastic. But if we don't believe or accept God's word on this ... then our lives show it.

**3. Do we become perturbed, ticked off, when people drop into our space and we find ourselves not being able to do what we had planned.**