

Rights and Responsibilities

“But I have not used any of these rights.”

1 Corinthians 9:15 (NIV)

Ours is a generation where some people demand their rights but then seem to ignore their responsibilities. Excuses abound as to why people cannot do what they should in life. The idea that we “ought” to do certain things is sadly missing from the horizon of too many people today in the western world.

The Christian view is that we have many responsibilities in life and we seek diligently to perform the things that we ought to do. So believers are quick to step up to the plate (a baseball term) in order to perform their responsibilities. However, as followers of Jesus, we know that we should not be aggressive in demanding our rights.

“Does this mean we are to let people walk all over us?” someone asks. Not necessarily, but when a person raises that question I wonder if they are in the camp of those who are always demanding what they believe the world owes them. It is a legitimate question, but we should be careful how anxious we are to get all we should have in this life.

Possibly the question should be raised, “Do we deserve what we have when millions of people in the world starve?” “Are we who are blessed the ones who deserve the blessings, and those who suffer deserve that portion in life?” A thoughtful response should be that we who have so much in life are no more worthy than those who are starving.

I have visited some third world countries where people never see a doctor or dentist in their lifetime. I have seen people who do not know where their next meal is coming from. I am not of the opinion that I have the right to a kitchen full of food while others do not have a home, never mind one full of food.

We who are in the western world need to lower our standard of living so that we can invest in raising the standard of living for the poor. I know some people who have earned a lot of money in their business careers but use much of it to relieve the suffering of others. When they could buy a Cadillac, they drive a Chevrolet instead. What they save is given to comfort those who will

never own any car.

Christians are not to hoard and keep all they make for themselves. We need to hear Paul’s comment on how he did not ask for what was rightfully his as a minister of the Gospel. God had told the churches to finance the work of preachers and teachers, and they had—and still have—the right to expect adequate payment for their work. Even that legitimate right Paul did not seek in his work. He paid his own way in ministry when the churches should have paid it for him.

All of us should look to the real needs around us and world wide in order to find legitimate places we can exercise our responsibilities to help relieve suffering. Even those in want can find places to help others like the widow in Mark 12:42 who gave the last she had. Jesus saw her sacrifice. We believe He saw to it she was repaid. God is no one’s debtor. Be sure you fulfill your responsibilities to help the poor, visit the sick, and give what you can. Great will be your reward in heaven.

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