

Introduction: Living in an age of rights

- We live in an “age of rights”: consumer rights, workers’ rights, individual rights...
- Social media is filled with messages like “be yourself,” “don’t hold back,” “take care of yourself.”
- Yet the Bible’s idea of freedom is **not using our rights for ourselves**.
- Paul demonstrates “the freedom not to use one’s rights.”
→ This is the essence of Christian freedom.

Question: Why did Paul refuse to use his rights?

- Some in the Corinthian church criticized Paul:
“Is he really an apostle?” “Maybe he doesn’t receive payment because he lacks authority.”
- In those days, teachers normally received financial support.
- But Paul chose to work with his own hands as a tentmaker and not receive payment.
→ It was a deliberate decision for the sake of the Gospel.

I. The rights Paul possessed (vv. 4–14)

1. **Legitimate rights (vv. 4–6)**
The right to eat, to marry, and to receive support.
2. **Common reasoning (v. 7)**
Workers naturally deserve their wages.
3. **Biblical foundation (vv. 8–10)**
Deuteronomy 25:4 – “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.” → Workers deserve reward.
4. **Application to ministry (vv. 11–12)**
Those who sow spiritual things deserve material support.
5. **Temple system and the Lord’s command (vv. 13–14)**
Priests lived from offerings; Jesus said, “The worker deserves his wages.”
👉 Paul clearly had the right to receive financial support.

II. Paul’s choice and reasons (vv. 12b, 15–17)

1. **The choice: not to use his rights (vv. 12b, 15)**
“I have not used any of these rights.”
→ He worked by his own hands and received no payment.
2. **Reason 1: to avoid hindering the Gospel (v. 12b)**
“So as not to put an obstacle in the way of the Gospel of Christ.”
→ He didn’t want anyone to think he preached for money.
3. **Reason 2: the nature of his calling (vv. 16–17)**
“Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!”
→ It was not optional but a divine calling.
→ Paul could not remain silent, even without reward.
👉 Paul chose “the freedom of not using his rights” for the sake of the Gospel.

III. The value of Paul's choice (v. 18)

- "My reward is to offer the Gospel free of charge."
→ His joy was in **not using his rights**.
- "I would rather die than use them."
→ Letting go of his rights was his pride and reward.

True Freedom

- The world: freedom = exercising one's rights.
- Paul: freedom = **voluntarily surrendering one's rights for love and for the Gospel**.
- This mirrors the life of Jesus Christ Himself.

Philippians 2:6–8

Though He was in the form of God, He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, and became obedient to death—even death on a cross.

👉 Paul followed Christ's example by relinquishing his rights.

Conclusion: Living in the freedom of surrendering one's rights

1. **Examine your rights.**
Time, money, opinions, preferences—are they truly used for the Gospel?
2. **Make Gospel-centered decisions.**
Let the standard not be "for me," but "for Christ."
3. **Follow Christ's example.**
Christ did not assert His rights but became a servant.
→ Surrendering your rights is not defeat; it is the greatest freedom—becoming like Christ.

Reflection Questions

- What "rights" am I holding on to today?
- If letting them go brings someone closer to the Gospel, how will I respond?