

Workers and Wages

"For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,' and, 'The laborer deserves his wages.'" (1 Tim. 5:18, ESV)

One of the virtues Paul encourages Christian to make their own is repeated from an Old Testament precept: The worker has the right to earn a living by their working. In this verse, Paul cites Moses (Deut. 25:4) as well as Jesus himself (Luk. 10:7; Mat. 10:10 also records this teaching of Jesus, saying food instead of wages). This principle stands alongside that of not stealing, guarding the heart of the one who does it. When John the Baptist was preaching, he prescribed repentance the following way, "'Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, 'Teacher, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Collect no more than you are authorized to do.' Soldiers also asked him, 'And we, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.'" (Luk. 3:12-14) Both groups were told to earn their money in an acceptable way, through effort and not intimidation, justification of their own actions, or profiteering the wages of others.

I have personally had trouble following this precept in my life, but have been convinced of the importance of this principle since becoming a Christian. There was always the temptation to use the Internet to receive music, movies, computer programs, games, etc. without paying for a license to use them. The last few years, I have been purging my files of such things, deleting files, destroying discs, buying copies of songs Online that I want to have.

There was a time that I rationalized such behavior and justified it, but the more I considered what scripture had to say, the more I realized how my activities were hurting those who made their living based on their work. I heard many such justifications, such as, "It's only hurting the corporations, not the artists" and they seemed seductive and permitted me to do something I later regretted. I didn't want to admit what I was doing was wrong, so I would not stop doing it. When I convinced myself that I was sinning, I convicted myself and decided to stop. Jesus's teaching on the Golden Rule (Mat. 7:12) came into view as I realized I wouldn't condone such behavior if it were my efforts that were being used. I am convinced that unless I own a license to a particular media, I should not receive it, possess it, or enjoy it. My hope is that I earn money in an acceptable way, through effort and not intimidation, justification of my own actions, or profiteering the wages of others. Stealing is not just the act of taking an object, but receiving something for nothing, violating the principle Paul preached. (1 Tim. 5:18) If I preach or teach against gambling, let me also preach and teach against other forms of receiving something for nothing.