

"All Things Are Lawful ..."

"... for me, but not all things are expedient. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any" (1 Cor. 6:12). Twice in this letter Paul writes, "All things are lawful, but not all things are expedient;" here and again in 10:23. There is variation in the phrase that follows, however. In this passage Paul wrote, "All things are lawful but I will not be brought under the power of any." In chapter ten he wrote, "All things are lawful ... but not all things edify."

It is evident that although the apostle wrote "all things are lawful," the "all things" must be understood in a limited sense. There is no way we can understand the apostle to say "all murder is lawful, but not all murder is expedient." Some things are unlawful and Paul has just concluded a list of such: idolatry, fornication, homosexuals, adulterers, covetousness, stealing, reviling, as well as other like manner things. To practice such things would bar the door to the kingdom of God to those who did so. Some things are unlawful and to force Paul's words "all things are lawful" to mean every conceivable thing man might do is acceptable to God is to greatly misrepresent his meaning. The phrase, "all things are lawful for me," is akin in understanding to two other statements from the same pen. In Romans 14:14 the apostle wrote, "I know, and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus Christ, that nothing is unclean of itself: save that to him who accounteth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean." To Titus Paul said, "To the pure all things are pure; but to them that are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure" (Titus 1:15). Who is willing to affirm that nothing is unclean; that any vile, coarse, wicked deed is pure? To ask is to answer. These four passages: 1 Corinthians 6:12, 10:23, Romans 14:14, and Titus 1:15 all must be understood as limited in the things they allow.

The phrase in 1 Corinthians 6:14, "All things are lawful for me," is the beginning of a new paragraph and a new subject. He wrote, "Meats for the belly and the belly for meats: but God shall bring to naught both it and them" (1 Cor. 6:12). The Gnostics and followers of the Nicolaitians which would be such an insidious evil in the later part of the first century sprang from such arguments as Paul considered here: "Meats for the belly and the belly for meats." In short, since God made man and authored the appetites moral man has, that validates any appetite the body may have and the satisfying of it. Since the body craves food, it is lawful to eat food, and since there are sexual desires, satisfying those desires is right and proper in whatever manner man chooses. Right? Wrong! It is right to desire material things but sinful to covet and take the material things of others. It is right to fulfill one's needs in marriage, but man is more than an animal, he is a being

created in God's image and he must know that *"the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body"* and that his *"body is a temple of the Holy Spirit"* (1 Cor. 6:13, 19).

We must exercise caution even in *"lawful things"* for not all lawful things are expedient nor edify. Sometimes *"lawful things"* become a stumbling block to a weak brother (1 Cor. 8:9). Some things we may exercise our liberty and bring about the death of the weak brother for whom Christ died (1 Cor. 8:11). In addition to this, we may become a slave to things that are otherwise lawful; of which possibility Paul warns and adds, *"I will not be brought under the power of any."* Exercising prudence and restraint is needful in whatever *"lawful"* thing we do. Some things are neither required nor condemned; in which things God gives us liberty to indulge or obtain. But even in those things we must act with care that we do not *"judge ourselves in the things which we allow"* (Rom. 14:22).

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