

MAKE YOURSELF USEFUL!

- **euchrestos** - easy to make use of, useful (2 Timothy 2:21, 4:11; Philemon 11)
 - **achrestos** - useless, unprofitable (found only in Philemon 11)
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Philemon 11

The book of Philemon is about a runaway slave named "Onesimus." His name means "profitable" or "helpful" - in other words, useful or beneficial. Originally he was nothing of the sort, but God changed all that. In verse 11, Paul uses a play on words, using a *second* word for "useful" (euchrestos) to describe the change that had happened. Onesimus (the "useful" one) was once "useless" (achrestos) but now has become "useful" (euchrestos). Becoming a disciple of Jesus causes great changes in one's life!

2 Timothy 2:21

Paul uses an illustration to describe those who accomplish good things for God, as compared to those who don't. The one is described as a "vessel of honor" - useful to the Master (God) and ready to serve him, doing what is good. The other is described as a "vessel of dishonor." Do you want to make sure you are a "vessel of honor"? Check the context to see what you need to do.

2 Timothy 4:11

Paul found Mark to be "useful" (helpful) in his ministry. If this is the same Mark who deserted Paul during his first missionary journey (Acts 15:37-38), it testifies to the power of Christ, which changes the lives of those who love him. Mark wasn't of much use to Paul back then! [Note: It also testifies to the value of another person's encouragement: Barnabas (the "son of Encouragement" - Acts 4:36) continued to work with Mark at a time when Mark was of no value to Paul's ministry - Acts 15:39.]

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

Look at the verses before and after 2 Timothy 2:21. How will a "vessel of honor" (or one intended for "noble purposes" - NIV translation) be different from a "vessel of dishonor" (or one intended for "ignoble purposes" - NIV translation)? To what degree are these characteristics (good or bad) a part of your life? What can you do to increase the good characteristics and decrease the bad ones?

To most people, slavery is a totally negative concept, and often carries with it the idea of a cruel taskmaster brutally beating helpless victims. And though the cruel treatment of humans (whether or not slaves) has always existed, since the time sin entered the world, the Bible's concept of slavery does not always carry those evil connotations. There are times that the Bible speaks about slavery (or being a servant) in a good sense! (See Deuteronomy 15:16-17; Romans 1:1; 6:22; 1 Corinthians 7:20-22; 9:19,27; James 1:1 as a few examples.) Furthermore, the principles that govern a master-slave relationship (see Ephesians 6:5-9, for example) would apply to *many* situations in which one person has authority over another. The employer-employee relationship would be one example. Think about how Onesimus' conversion affected his attitude toward the way he fulfilled his obligations as a servant. How did he demonstrate the presence of love (1 Corinthians 13) in his life? How can you apply these principles in your life, in any relationship in which you are under another person's authority? [You may want to study some of the New Testament verses which make reference to serving God or serving other people.]

Have you ever failed to be "useful" when you should have been? Did you ever fail to have a kindness in your heart that expressed itself in good and useful ways? We all have! Assuming that the Mark mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:11 is the same one that is mentioned in Acts 15:37-38, how can this passage be a source of encouragement to you? Even if you are unsure about the connection between these two passages, this passage in Acts can illustrate how you can be a source of encouragement and help to others. Consider this passage, and also Galatians 5:13. How can you follow this example?

ASSIGNMENT:

Set some goals for ways you can make yourself "useful" to others. In the next few days, focus on trying to fulfil some of these goals. Also be watching for unexpected situations (which will most likely occur) in which you can display the "useful kindness" that 1 Corinthians 13:4 mentions. If God's love has filled your heart (and it has, if you belong to him), look for ways to express it to others!