

The Lakeview Lamp

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” – **Psalm 119:105**

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Working During Worship: Abraham’s Faith Vs. Saul’s Wrong Choice

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“Where is it written that a Christian should not work during worship services?” No less than five times within the past month I have been asked concerning the spiritual state of Christians who work during worship services (twice by fellow evangelists, twice in Bible class, and once in a business meeting). It has become routine, after preaching on attendance, to hear someone ask, “Well, I miss one or two services each week because I HAVE TO work. Am I sinning?” In gentleness, and without impugning the motives of the questioner, I inquire, “Why do you HAVE TO work when the church assembles for worship?” The response most often made is to point out that the Bible says to support one’s family (**1 Timothy 5:8**), and that one often has to forsake the assembling in order to fulfill Paul’s admonition.

I believe Bible examples of faith teach differently. God has not given us commands in such a way that we are inevitably going to be confused over prioritizing them. Saul tried the argument about conflicting good works when he brought back the sheep and oxen from the Amalekite battle. Indeed, sacrificing animals to God was a good thing under the old law, but Samuel said, “*Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice*” (**1 Samuel 15:22** – TN). God expects us to use the same reasoning.

When God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham did not say within himself, “Now let me think, God has also told me that it is wrong to kill, and He also has forbidden human sacrifice, and He has promised me a great nation through Isaac; and after all, I am required to love and protect my children...not kill them. Therefore, I must choose not to keep this particular command.” WRONG! By faith, Abraham offered up Isaac. He trusted that God would keep His promise to him when he kept God’s commandment.

This is one of the issues that fuels my belief that a preacher ought to work secularly for a time in order to better understand the true needs of Christians who work secularly. Please forgive any semblance of boasting, but I have spent several years in secular work, both in full time and part time bases. I know what an employer can and cannot do with regard to Christians who wish to worship. More importantly, I know what a Christian can and cannot do as well. If preachers, teachers, and elders were to taste the temptation to forsake the assembling for work and overcome it, they could set an example for others to do the same. They would realize that job requirements are not a hindrance to faithful service and could teach the same to others, encouraging them to deeper faith and devotion. A Christian who works instead of worshipping does not need a preacher who will justify his absenteeism; he needs a preacher who will help him press toward greater faithfulness.

God has promised that if we seek His kingdom first, He will see to our other needs. If we lose our job because we were standing for the truth, we must have the faith that God has not forsaken us. We may not get as good of a job, but we will be cared for by God. What some are defending when they forsake assembling for work is not that they will starve to death, but that they might not be able to continue living up to the level to which they are accustomed.

Where is our faith today? It is certainly far short of the faith of Abraham. We are more like King Saul, excusing ourselves from the command to assemble with a misapplication of the command to support our families. In Christ's parable of the wedding feast, two of the guests asked to be excused for financial reasons. One had purchased five yoke of oxen and HAD to go try them. This was a major purchase! It is the equivalent of buying five dump trucks or five farm tractors today. He could be financially ruined if he didn't see to this vital matter. The second man had bought a piece of ground. Perhaps the future financial stability of his family rested on this purchase. The Lord said neither one was excused from the gathering. Does this parable apply to the issue of missing services for secular work? It certainly shows the Lord's attitude toward making money instead of coming to His feast.

Is the brother who works instead of worshipping a sinning brother? If he is working to sustain a high lifestyle, then yes...he is covetous and guilty of sin. If he forsakes the assembling to work because he fears the consequences of standing up to his boss, then he, being weak in faith, needs to be uplifted to higher courage. It is not unfair judgment to consider a brother who works during worship to be a weak brother, just as it is reasonable to consider a Christian weak who does not have a faith strong enough to keep any of the other New Testament commands. Some call evangelists who encourage this kind of dedication to Christ hard-liners, Pharisees, or binders where God has not bound; but, before one makes this kind of assessment of the preacher, it might be wise to consider the following:

1) Is it a spiritually safe policy to tell Christians, in the absence of scriptural proof, that God accepts the practice of regularly forsaking the assembling for work?

2) Who is the stronger Christian – the one who misses one third or one half or two thirds of the services for work, or the Christian who takes a lower paying job in order to attend all of them (**John 7:24**)?

3) Suppose the factory management did demand that one work instead of assemble. Must a Christian accede to the demands of anyone before that which Christ has said? Let's apply that reasoning elsewhere. What if the elders demanded that the preacher must not teach on a certain scriptural imperative or he would be fired? Does he declare the whole counsel of God or follow the rule of erring men? What if the government demanded that churches of Christ disband and cease gathering to worship? Since when do the demands of the world supercede the will of God? According to this argument, one must heed the demands of one's employer, and that God approves of this choice. Where is the book, chapter, and verse to defend this? I answer this issue with Abraham's faith and King Saul's wrong choice.

I am not going to cast out a brother who works on Sunday. With my arm around his shoulders, I am going to encourage him to grow up like Abraham. Do we really want to face the Judge in that last day knowing that we taught others to make King Saul's choice instead of living Abraham's faith?

News and Notes

We have new business cards to advertise the church and Bible Call.

Members:

- * Virginia Bryant was not approved for a shot for her knee. The only option now for her is surgery.
- * Mary Burnett remains at home on Hospice care.
- * Connie Cobern has been having problems with her gout.
- * Metty Fain remains in Highland Manor Nursing Home; Room B2; 215 Highland Circle Dr; Portland, TN 37148.
- * Sarah Neighbours is doing better after surgery last Monday.
- * Ame White is off some of her pain medicine due to stomach problems, which means she is having more pain.

Friends and Family:

- * Madison Cherry, **the Neighbours' niece, is still at Vanderbilt. She has now been diagnosed with ecoli.**
- * Sandlyn Fultz is going to a clinic in NC this week to fine tune her nutritional program. For updates on her (and Barry, who received good CT results last **week**), go to www.caringbridge.org/visit/nathanandsandlyn. Sandlyn's birthday is tomorrow.

Absent: David Bansemer (AM only).

New Reports: None known.



“The works of His hands are truth and justice; all His precepts are sure. They are upheld forever and ever; they are performed in truth and uprightness.” – Psalm 111:7-8