

“Labor”

by Wayne Goff

Monday is known as the Labor Day holiday. I've always thought it ironic that everyone stops labor on Labor Day – but I suppose we are honoring those who “labor” while taking a break.

The Holiday

Labor Day is the first Monday in every September designated “to honor and recognize the American labor movement and the works and contributions of laborers to the development and achievements of the United States.” The first Labor Day was held on September 5, 1882.

Biblical Labor

Peter, James and John **“toiled”** all night as fishermen before Jesus called them to become fishers of men (**Lk. 5:4**). The Bible absolutely approves of those who labor long and hard for their income. The original Greek word (*κοπιαῶ*) means “to feel fatigue; by implication, to work hard: – (bestow) labor, toil, be wearied” (*Strong's Greek Lexicon*). So we are talking about “hard work.” This began in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve: *“Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it”* (**Gen. 2:15**).

On the other hand, Jesus reminds His disciples that the lilies of the field *“neither toil nor spin”* and yet God arrays them with their beauty (**Matt. 6:29**). The lesson is that we should labor with our hands, but trust in God that He will provide what we need. Some brethren labor like it all depends upon them!

God also instructs us to **labor** in order to practice benevolence. **Hoarding** is a covetous mindset that is not of God, but of selfishness. *“I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’”* (**Acts 20:35**). Young people should learn to save 10-20% of their income, both to contribute to the Lord’s Cause (**1 Cor. 16:1-2**), and to support the weak (see **James 1:27**).

Often in the New Testament, we read of **spiritual labor** – working for the Lord in whatever capacity that might be: preaching, teaching, caring for the poor and weak, and hospitality, especially for those who preach the gospel. *“Greet Mary, who labored much for us.... Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord”* (**Romans 16:6, 12**). We may not know much about these disciples, but the Lord knew them and praised them. This gives us a moment to ask the question: **“How do you and I labor for the Lord today?”**

The apostles **labored** greatly for the Cause of Christ (**1 Cor. 4:12; 15:10; Phil. 2:16; Col. 1:29**). We know how that did it. They traveled over the entire world in their generation preaching and teaching the gospel to a spiritually-hungry world. Their **labors** caused the Gospel to be heard by everyone!

Elders are to be recognized for their spiritual work of overseeing the local congregation and looking out for the souls of men. *“And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you”* (**1 Thess. 5:12**). It is definitely a thankless job, but at the same time a **labor** of love (see also **1 Tim. 5:17**).

The church at Ephesus was praised by Jesus Christ for their **spiritual labor**. *“And you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary”* (**Rev. 2:3**). Every local church’s energy should be described as a **“labor.”** Some are shirking their duties!

Jesus’ Invitation

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (**Matthew 11:28**). There are many in our sin-sick world who do not **labor** with the burden of the guilt of sin, but for those who do, Jesus will give you rest (relief).

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