

## Laboring for the Lord

The Jews had several *feasts* and *festivals* (and *fasts*)- some were commanded by God such as the weekly *Sabbath*, and three so-called “pilgrim” festivals which required the males to journey to the sanctuary at Jerusalem: Passover and Unleavened Bread (10<sup>th</sup> plague and departure from Egypt); Harvest/Weeks/Pentecost (first fruits of harvest); and the Ingathering/Booths (completion of harvest and pilgrimage to Israel), cf. Deut.16:1-17. They also celebrated other feasts that God apparently didn’t command, such as Lights, or Hanukkah (cleansing and rededication of Temple by Judas Maccabeus), and Purim (deliverance from Haman). There were many other feasts, festivals, and fasts- both prescribed and not, that they celebrated.

Tomorrow is “Labor Day” for us. It was meant to honor the contributions of American laborers to the development and achievements of the United States (and to tell ladies when to stop wearing white!). It marks the unofficial end of summer and beginning of fall, and is the closest thing to the Jewish feast of Harvest and Booths (indeed many are dwelling in “tents” this weekend!). It is celebrated with camping, cookouts, and various recreational pursuits. But consider, for a few moments, a couple of biblical uses of “labor”...

- **Jesus often used *labor* or *laborers* in His parables and metaphors.** Though He dealt with priests, kings, and those in authority, most of time was spent with the “common” man. Thus, His message needed to be relatable to them. He made it so by using language and illustrations that were “real” and well-known to them.
- **Paul also often spoke of his and those who preached the gospel as *laborers*, 1Cor.3:8; 15:10; 16:16.** But far from a life of ease or pleasant endeavor, he also compared the *labor* involved that of a woman giving birth, Gal.4:11,19.
- **Paul gave the Ephesians and us an *example to follow*, Acts 20:35.** Are we “*working hard*” to *help the weak* and *remembering* that “*it is more blessed to give than receive*”? Or, are we, like some modern “workers,” more concerned about time off, benefits, and a paycheck? This is a huge problem in the American *labor force* today, and it unfortunately bleeds over to the church as well!
- **We are told to *appreciate those who “diligently labor” among us, and to “esteem them highly in love,”* 1Thess.5:12-13.** I know many of you do very much *appreciate* and *esteem* our Elders- I see it in your attitude and actions, and I hear it in your (public) prayers on their behalf. But every congregation seems to have those who’d rather complain and criticize instead, cf. Phil.2:14-15.
- **“What about me- I can’t *work* like I used to when I was younger?”** If we can truly do little else, we can always “*labor(ing) earnestly*” for others in “*prayers*” that they “*may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God,*” Col.4:12.

**Conclusion:** In the New Testament, “*labor*” (or its derivatives) is usually translated from one of two Greek words: ***kopos* (kop-os)**- literally, *a beating; intense labor united with trouble and toil*; or ***kopiao* (kop-ee-ah-o)**- to *grow weary, tired, exhausted; to labor with wearisome effort*. Think about this relative to how we typically *think of* and actually *labor “for the Lord.”* Is it that we *exhaust ourselves* for the Lord and His kingdom, or that we just consider Him and it *tiresome/wearisome*, Isa.43:22; Mal.1:13.

Jesus invited “*all who are weary (kopiao) and heavy laden*” and promised them “*rest,*” Matt.11:28. Surely He intended those *exhausted* from the burden of sin and life outside of Him. But eternal reward is promised to those whose “*labors*” (*kopos*) **in** and **for** His kingdom and cause, Rev.14:13. Are we truly *laboring* for the Lord, or just *punching the clock* and becoming evermore *weary* of so-doing?