

Labor Day

9/2/2018

Colossians 3:23

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters,”

Tomorrow is Labor Day, a national holiday devoid of the cultural traditions of Thanksgiving, Easter, or Christmas. It is not an amalgamation of religious and social viewpoints. It is a secular holiday; a day off from work, and we each have carved out our own way of spending this time. There are no standard activities or customs. So, we vacation, barbeque, watch sports and movies, buy stuff, go on picnics, attend parties, and spend quiet time away from all that I just mentioned. It is the unofficial farewell to Summer, and when we say good-bye to wearing white and say hello to yellow flags of the football season.

Although the beginnings of Labor Day are a bit ambiguous, tradition credits Peter J. McGuire, co-founder of the American Federation of Labor, founder of the New York City Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, with coming up with the idea. He had spoken at a Canadian labor festival in 1882 and was so impressed with the event that he proposed it to the Central Labor Union.

Then again, it could have been Matthew Maguire, of the Central Labor Union who originated the concept in 1882.

And yet another resource claims that it could have started in 1791 on the day of the Philadelphia carpenter strike, when they demanded the reduction to a 10-hour day and overtime pay.

Regardless of the details to its origin, the first Labor Day was celebrated in New York on Tuesday, September 5, 1882, with a strike, followed by a large parade organized by the Central Labor Union. It was created to honor the working class and their social and economic achievements. It was later signed into law as a federal holiday on June 28, 1894 by Grover Cleveland. In truth, this holiday at the time only applied to federal workers. Each State had been declaring their own legal holiday, by the time it was signed into law at the federal level, over 30 States had already adopted the holiday. Eventually, it became the norm for all States.

Today, unions are not as popular as they were prior to 1950. In the 1950s, more than 33% of workers were union members; today it is 12%. Although the power and usefulness of unions continues to be argued from both sides, we can be grateful to them for a 40-hour work week, weekends off, sick leave and overtime, the minimum wage, employee rights, workplace safety, child labor laws, retirement benefits, healthcare, and Labor Day.

There continues to be animosity and resentments between large corporations and their employees, as well as with laborers and management. Businesses and services of all kinds and sizes since the beginning of time, need people, and people need jobs and security, so there seems to be a mutually beneficial social arrangement available. At times, we still struggle regarding the

amount of profit necessary for the business owner, CEO and shareholders and the wages and respect required by the workers.

Wise business owners realize that happy, well-trained employees result in greater efficiency, greater productivity, and therefore greater profits or results. But there is always a balance required. The company needs employees, and the employee needs the company. What the employee must realize is that the company does not exist so they can have a job; they exist to create a profit through offering a product or service. What the company must realize is that without employees they cannot successfully create the product or offer the service to create a profit.

There is always another company to work for, another job to be had, but it is difficult and counterproductive to hop from one position to another. The company can always release employees, but this is also counterproductive since continually having to retrain a new employee takes time, energy, and raises costs, thus reducing profits. It is about balance.

It is also about respect. In the laborer-management scenario, what the laborer must realize is that the owner and manager also work. Their function is different; their purpose is different. What the manager-owner must realize is that the value of the laborer as a human being is the same as their own. They may have a different function, but they are of the same value at the human level as everyone else; they deserve the same respect and consideration as everyone else. In God's eyes there is no difference in value

between the laborer, volunteer, manager, CEO or owner. That differentiation is something that we human beings create, not God.

The importance of a job or position is something that human beings create, not God. God considers all work important. No matter where the job lies on the laborer-owner scale, every job is important, every job has its place. They all matter. *Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters.*

We are here to work, to serve, to have purpose. Ephesians 4:28 tells us: *Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.*

We are to work, earn an income so that we can share with those in need. That applies to our own families. As a man, a husband and father, I am motivated to work because I have a family – kids and a wife – who have needed help. I have a heart and a conscience, so I give to others in need. If I did not have a job, how could I take care of my family? How could I give to others? We are obliged to work, or else we become the one in need.

To me this is simple, clear, and logical. But apparently it is not to everyone. For some people, the ego convinces us that a particular job is beneath us or doesn't pay enough. While that may be true, what are the alternatives? Not to have any job at all?

I went through a time, after earning a Masters Degree, when I couldn't find a job that I wanted in Music. So, I took a job outside of music in the dental field. Mary was working, but we needed an income from me to support the family. It was a new industry to me, a new position, but over these 27 years I have made an income, learned some new things, and have helped meet our household needs.

I don't use my musical education directly, but I use it here in church when I play the guitar, the piano, and sing. I don't make a living with music, but I serve God with it, and I am blessed.

Psalm 128:2 - *You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you.* It is through the work of our hands, our efforts, that we find our sustenance and blessings.

Work is a blessing; a career, a job, no matter what the position or task, is a blessing. We are told in Ecclesiastes 3:22 – *“There is nothing better for people than to be happy in their work. That is our lot in life.”*

As I approach retirement, I sometimes pause and wonder what I am going to do after I leave my dental position. I am fortunate to be able to look forward to continuing serving the church as the Minister, but I will have a lot of time on my hands. It makes me a bit nervous. I have spoken with dentists who share those concerns. Work is part of our lives; it is our lot in life. I suspect the work will change: the yard, garage, chores, and other household

opportunities will take the place of an 8-hour work day. I might even be able to write more songs, practice more, even take guitar lessons. Although my income will decrease profoundly, I might be able to volunteer and give back in other ways. To be certain, I will find things to do because without question, working keeps our bodies healthy, our minds sharp, and our lifespan longer. So perhaps we should not want to retire as much as to ‘repurpose’; to serve God and the family of God with a new purpose or function., Let us think of it as being ‘re-energized’, instead of ‘re-tired’.

Labor Day is a day we set aside for special recognition of the people whose work makes life more enjoyable, healthy, comfortable, and secure. May our thoughts and prayers bless the vast network of people working throughout our land.

We give thanks for those whose labor benefits and nourishes us. We appreciate the helping hands in our land and in other lands. We ask God’s blessings for those who plant and harvest food, transport products and people, provide health care, work in schools, plants, homes, and offices everywhere.

Labor Day is also a day of rest, a well-earned respite from our labors, either on a job or in life. It is a time for us to ‘re-energize’, relax, be grateful, and enjoy all the good that God has sent our way. So, however you choose to spend your Labor Day, I pray that you find contentment and reprieve from your toils.

Happy Labor Day! Let us pray....