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## Vacation Rest

The season for vacations is nearing, and many of us are looking forward to time away from our work. The word, “vacation,” has Latin roots, and has given rise to several other English words depicting emptiness. “Vacate” and “vacant” have the same Latin origins, and both of them imply that something is empty. When we go on vacation, we vacate our lives of their normal routines (job, education, etc.) and we begin a time of leisure. We become exempt from our normal duties and we are no longer required to serve at our jobs as we normally do. Still, most of us when on vacation, in emptying our lives of our normal routines and duties, fill them with something else. Many of us fill our vacations with activities that keep us busy: travel, sightseeing, and camping (where tending to our daily needs like preparing food is far more difficult than what we have in our well-equipped kitchens at home). Yet, while we are often busy during our vacations, we do empty our lives from the normal routines.

And this is why many will say, “A change is as good as a vacation.” Thus, some may opt to volunteer with Disaster Response Services, an organization that helps people rebuild homes after a natural disaster. Joining together with a group of like-minded people can be an invigorating exercise for many and may provide a welcome vacation from the routines of life. Others may own a cottage or second home and find themselves maintaining that property on their vacation time. Yet, for them the change of pace is a change from the routine and they feel it is a holiday. Others may participate in what we have come to call a “staycation” meaning that they stay at home and enjoy their life there without having to go to work.

It is true that vacations as we know them are a relatively new concept. People who work in a fulltime position receive pay throughout their vacation. This was not always the case. Only 100 years ago, unions were advocating that workers receive pay on significant public holidays: Christmas, Thanksgiving, Canada Day, etc. As this idea took root, unions began to advocate for more days off, and paid vacation leave became standard practice. In fact, if an employer does not give paid vacation to its employees, they are required to give them additional pay to compensate for this absence. Paid vacation leave, something we consider to be our right, is not something that most people have enjoyed for most of history.

As we may know, the British do not use the word, “vacation,” but, rather, call their vacations “holidays.” Many Canadians interchange the two words. “Holiday” is a contraction of “holy day,” and early holidays were given in which people were given permission to refrain from attending to their normal jobs on days that were dedicated to special Christian days. Thus, Christmas, Good Friday, Ascension Day, and the like were days when people did not have to work but, rather, could participate in worship services and celebrate God’s faithful provision of salvation. Again, in England, as in North America, the concept of a holiday was expanded from just those special “holy days” to also include paid leave from work. Holidays, in England today, have very little to do with celebrating God’s grace in Jesus Christ. It might be better if the British change their word to “vacation,” because that is really what they are doing, emptying their lives of their daily routines of work and education.

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While the idea of being given paid time off for vacation is relatively new, being given time off for entertainment purposes can be traced back to Roman times. If they saw fit, the emperor would declare a public “holiday” so that the people of Rome could go to the Coliseum and watch gladiators kill each other for sport. There is no doubt that that some of the early Roman “holidays” were rather unpleasant for Christians, for they were the ones who suffered death while the rest of the “vacationing” Roman population cheered as the lions and bulls destroyed the lives of followers of Jesus Christ. (But this is not something we like to associate with the concept of holiday or vacation.)

Back to our vacations (or holidays). As I reflected on the privilege we have to take vacations (often while receiving a salary), we should be thankful that we live at a time and in a place where this is possible. We forget how privileged we are to be able to take time away from our regular lives to enjoy ourselves without having to work for our daily bread. We can be thankful to the unions of a century ago who fought for this privilege and for an economy which is strong enough that businesses can pay workers even when they are not producing. These are gifts we should never take for granted.

Of course, we should also recognize that long before unions, God built into this world the ability for all of us to have time off from our normal routines to enjoy a day when we don’t have to work. It is actually true that God designed the world in such a way that instead of having the ability to vacate our jobs for just a couple of weeks every year, we can take almost 8 weeks (52 days) off from our jobs and not have to worry about the loss of wages that comes from not working. We spread those 52 days out over the entire year, and they occur every 7 days. We call these days when we don’t have to work to stay alive “sabbaths.” When we rest from our labours once every 7 days, we do so with the assurance that God will provide for us, that we don’t need to work to stay alive. Those days of rest are truly a gift from God, and we should be always thankful that we can rest from our labours. For our vacation times (2-3 weeks for most fulltime workers) we give thanks to unions who advocated for us and for employers who continue to provide for us so that we can take time away. But for the other 7½ weeks, we give God thanks that he has promised that he will take care of us as we refrain from our labours.

As I think about this, I do grow a little concerned. Even though unions have earned for us our paid vacation, they have not protected us from employers who have taken those 7½ weeks away from us while giving us a mere 2-3 weeks. We might wonder if we have lost more than we have gained. Perhaps we should again reclaim the importance of Sabbath rest, rejoicing in the fact that God gave us almost 8 weeks every year in which we need not work. That is much better than anything else any employer allows us.

*Pastor Gary*