

Straight Bible Talk

Manchester Church of Christ, Share Christ's Love and Share His Message

What Is Work?

"One man's work is another man's play," once said a wise man. In other words, work all depends upon how one looks at the matter. When a business executive plays golf, he probably would consider it play (unless he is playing with a customer, in which case, he might consider it work). When Tiger plays golf, it is hard to consider it as play when one looks at the determination written on his face.

Coming to an understanding of what God considers as work ought to be an easy matter, yet there seems to be no common understanding among those who claim to follow Jesus as to what is work and what is not. Salvation depends on a correct understanding.

Consider this definition, for example: Work is whatever requires human effort. By that definition, breathing would seem to be work since it requires the use of muscles and requires exertion. But when one tries to carry that definition over to Biblical matters there is a major problem.

Perhaps a good place to begin in working out a Biblical definition is with the Sabbath. At first sight, the Sabbath command seems quite simple. No work was to be done on the Sabbath day. There was to be no work by God's people and no work by their animals. Everyone was to rest on the Sabbath day.

A problem soon erupted. A man was found gathering wood on the Sabbath day. Not knowing exactly how the matter should be handled, those who had "caught" him, put him in custody until it should be determined how God wanted to handle the matter. God's instructions were to stone him. Gathering wood was determined to be a violation of the "no work" law on the Sabbath day.

There are several things that we can learn from this incident. First, gathering wood is a violation of the Sabbath command. Second, it was not at all clear what was work and what was not. Third, it was the Lord who decided what was work and what was not, on this occasion.

Later, many more questions would arise about what should be considered work and what should not. None of these matters were included in the legislation that came from Moses, but became a part of Jewish understanding.

Is it work to walk? Jewish tradition decided that it was not unless you walked too far and they made rules that decided that. Thus one reads about a "Sabbath day's journey." Please note that this was Jewish law and must be distinguished from God's law, given through Moses.

Since the Sabbath regulations extended to animals as well as people, the question arose, "Is it work for my donkey if I ride him on the Sabbath day?" Again, Jewish leaders were ready to give an answer. It was work if you carried a stick to beat the donkey. (It looks like they were willing to let the donkey decide if carrying someone was work or not!)

Another incident, in the life of Jesus, which helps us understand the difficulty that people had in deciding what was work and what was not, is found in his healing on the Sabbath day. When Jesus healed a lame man on the Sabbath, they said that he was "breaking the Sabbath." They arbitrarily decided that healing was work, a violation of the command to "rest." They were wrong.

Again, Jesus and his disciples were passing through a grain field on the Sabbath.

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Manchester
Church of Christ

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595 Tolland Turnpike

Sun Bible Classes—9 AM
Sun Worship—10 AM
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"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

Acts 17:31

All scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise indicated.

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Because they were hungry, Jesus' disciples picked the heads of grain and were eating them. "Look," they said, "your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath." They decided that picking grain to eat was work.

In the same context, Jesus argued that the priests in the temple "break" (profane) the Sabbath and yet they are innocent. It would seem that they are innocent because the work that they do is the work which God has commanded them.

When one acted in obedience to God on the Sabbath, it was not work. Obedience to God cannot be set aside because of the Sabbath day. The Pharisees could scream, "WORK," all day long and it would not change what God had decided Jesus should do, Sabbath or no Sabbath.

The Pharisees are not the only ones who engage in such behavior. All sorts of things are declared to be work without any word from God. All sorts of things are deemed to be all right, again, without any word from God.

But let us return to the subject of work. Recently a reader told me that repentance and baptism were both "work." That would be fine if God

had said so. We are not aware of any word from God that makes that declaration.

Others have argued that baptism cannot be necessary to salvation because it is work. What does one do with Peter's comment that "baptism does also now save us."

Certainly there is work that does not save. Buying mass cards has never gotten a soul out of purgatory. There is no purgatory, in the Bible, from which someone needs to be saved. Neither do prayers for the dead save them. Work that is not specified by God has no power to accomplish anything. It is work that does not save.

But "work" (effort) that God commands has always been important to salvation. Noah did a lot of "work" on the ark. (It did not suddenly materialize out of thin air.) Yet he was saved by his faith. Abraham did a lot of work to get from Ur of the Chaldees to the land of Canaan. Yet God declared him righteous, when he got there, and stayed there, because of his faith.

It is interesting that Jesus describes faith as a work in John 5:29. It takes effort to believe. The evidence must be examined. The

sources must be checked. The reliability of those sources needs to be established. Faith is not a guess. It is a conclusion reached after doing the proper "work."

One can scream all day long that baptism is a work, but it will not change what God has said about baptism. "He who believes AND is baptized shall be saved." "Repent and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." "Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." "Corresponding to that, (Noah's salvation through water, SGB) baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

Saved by faith, yes. Saved without effort, no. We must do the "work" that God commands.