

Summer Vacation

School is out and we are coming to the time of year that many Americans know as “summer vacation.” Summer vacation means several things. To the school children, it is approximately three months away from school. Most of us recall the anticipation of letting the books and school schedule go to absorb the delights of summer.

For many, summer vacation also means a trip, some travel plans, or a vacation to the beach, the mountains, or a resort. Those down south travel up north. Those in the hills head to the waterfront.

Christians are under the Scriptural directive to make sure that everything we do is to the glory of God. Most of us have mental boundaries and heart convictions about what is or is not acceptable for a summer trip. But is this a subject where it is “each to his own?” Are there any guidelines which we as the “peculiar people” of God ought to remember as we consider whether or not we will join the American tradition of going on vacation? As with any other subject, the Bible has teaching for us.

“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (2Ti 3:1-4).

This Scripture clearly objects to a lifestyle where our love for pleasure supersedes our love for God. When a Christian family considers the possibilities of vacation, they ought not to be driven primarily by the desire of going for the fun of it. This Scripture does not forbid pleasure, it objects to pursuit of pleasure at the expense of pursuing God.

This principle will define several things. First, it will define when our family takes a vacation. People who are committed to God first do not plan outings over Summer Bible School. Neither do they plan them over the time of an ordination. There is thought given to Lord’s Day observance. If we are gone over Sunday, where will we worship? How much raw energy will we exert on the Lord’s Day?

Have we ever considered how much love for God is displayed if we snuggle in a lawn chair to listen to a sermon CD (which would be our church), then grill a delightful lunch and spend the remainder of the Lord’s Day packing up the camper or cleaning the cabin for the next vacationers and traveling home to get a good night’s sleep so we can be at work on time Monday morning?

This principle also makes it clear that it matters what we do. Just because something is fun doesn't make it right. Having fun is addicting. It intoxicates us. People who are having fun will buy tickets to shows or films that they will be embarrassed to remember when they get home.

It is fun to go to the beach. So much fun that Christian people will lower their dress standards to swim with the world. Love for God and obedience to His commandments including modesty will cause Christian families to avoid the detrimental temptations of the public swimming areas.

A preeminent love for God is a constant check to our desires. Love for God guides the father as he scans the flyer advertising the museum, the restored village, the wildlife farm, or the restaurant guide. It's not okay to do everything that is fun. "But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately" (Luke 12:31-36).

Whenever a Christian family considers the possibility of a summer vacation, they must face the question of stewardship. Can a family spend \$5,000 for a six week trip with their own RV, while brothers in their church fellowship go hungry for want of daily bread? Can we spend money for that which is not bread while school funds or brotherhood assistance is in the red?

Recently, I read the testimony of a Mennonite minister from about 80 years ago. The man read an article challenging the Mennonite church to see what funds could be raised for an orphan project in India by laying aside the necktie. These were the days when a tie sold for under a dollar. This challenge led the man to give up his necktie.

Are we comfortable with the mentality we are instilling in our children by our vacation practice? The question remains: what are we spending money for? We must be honest; do our vacation plans truly say, "We are laying up a treasure in heaven; our lamps are trimmed and ready; we are waiting for Jesus' return?" If they don't, we'd best stay home.

"And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison. And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel: and she brought it to her mother. And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus. When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart: and when the people had heard thereof, they followed him on foot out of the cities. And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was

moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick” (Matt 14:10-14). Jesus had just received news that His cousin, John the Baptist, had been beheaded. In a normal human response, He headed to the desert. We do not know what all He wanted to do. We do know what He did. When Jesus went to the desert for recreation, at least 5,000 people went with Him on that vacation. There, He ministered to them. If summer vacation is on our agenda, so must be doing the will of the Father also. In all our getting away, we must ever leave room for the work of the Kingdom. Wouldn't it be the best vacation ever if we'd lead a soul to Christ at the Creation Museum, Williamsburg, or the country store near the Grand Canyon?

Take some tracts along, select a few specific sermon titles, and by all means take our Bibles wherever we go. We are soul winners first, and vacationers second. This was the way of Christ, and we are His disciples.

Let us consider the reality of our choices and be careful. Pleasure seeking is a desire which can master us. There are many outlets. Look up the illustrations in our Decrees and consider. But above all, let us all be guided by this one unshakable principle: when a man calls upon the name of the Lord and is saved, there are no vacations from this calling until he hears the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” We are saved to serve, not saved to vacation.

~Duane Witmer