

Why Christians May Observe Cultural Holidays

By a *cultural* holiday we simply mean any day (Monday through Saturday) that the civil government, an employer, or a school designates as a holiday. In America, this would include such holidays as New Year's Day, Good Friday, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day. While Christians are forbidden from observing such days in a pagan, atheistic, or superstitious way, we maintain that Christ has given all Christians the liberty to use such days for rest, recreation, and to pursue other labors.

To make our case, we will begin by examining the Biblical concept of work. Then, we will consider why Christian liberty allows all Christians to observe cultural holidays, as long as they avoid vice and pursue virtue on those days as on other days.

Christ commands His followers to have a strong work ethic. Bible-believing Christians have historically been recognized for their work ethic, honesty, and industry. Capitalism and American economic prosperity trace their roots in large part to John Calvin, Protestants, and Puritans. The Bible sets forth this work ethic in such passages as 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12, where the apostle Paul wrote, "For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread."

Likewise the respect of a Christian employee toward his employer can be seen in Ephesians 6:5-8: "Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether *he is* a slave or free."

Instead of stealing and taking, Christians want to work hard so that they can give to others: "Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with *his* hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need" (Ephesians 4:28).

Christian charity is from the heart; it is voluntary. Thus, neither the church nor the state should use *the Bible* as a justification to compel the transfer of wealth. The apostle Paul said, "So *let* each one *give* as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Whether in school, home, or business, Christians should be known for the superior quality of their labor; they should be exemplary students and employees.

Christians should never settle for mediocre work. Laziness or slothfulness is a sin. All Christians should strive for excellence in their work. Even if someone is not a genius, he should never get less than an A for effort.

What motivates a Christian to work so hard and do so well? The answer is simple—his love for Jesus.

Every true Christian wants to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. The apostle Paul exhorted the Corinthians: “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). This command should serve as a mission statement for every child of God.

Will I be a glutton with my eating? Will I be content with obesity? No way. I must glorify God through my eating.

Will I be a drunkard or a drug addict? No way. I must glorify God with my drinking and be sober-minded. I will not be intoxicated by alcohol or mind-altering drugs; rather, I will be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). I must exercise myself toward godliness (1 Timothy 4:7). “For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come” (1 Timothy 4:8).

My body is “the temple of the Holy Spirit” who is in me, whom I have from God; I am not my own. I was “bought at a price”; therefore I must glorify God in my body and in my spirit, which are God’s (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

In all my work, rest, and relaxation, I must seek to “do all to the glory of God”!

As we discuss in other studies, God has given all people one day in seven, the first day of the week, the Lord’s Day, as a day of worship and rest. Six days are for work, but the first day of the week, Sunday, is set apart as holy unto the covenant Lord.

However, does the Bible command us to go to school or work a job six days of every week? No, it does not. And this is where the Biblical doctrine of Christian liberty comes into play.

In Galatians 5:1, the apostle Paul exhorted the Galatians: “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.”

If the Bible does not command us to work the same job or do schoolwork six days of every week, then it is clear from Scripture that we have the liberty to take vacations, holidays, or “days off” work or school.

If the state, an employer, or a school sets aside a day or days as holidays, from which we are given a rest from our ordinary labors, then we may gladly accept and enjoy these days off work or school.

Now, though, another question arises: Is there a proper way to observe the day? What does the Bible say about how Christians are to observe such holidays? The Bible does not explicitly address the observance of cultural holidays, but the Lord does set forth principles throughout His Word that show us how such days ought to be observed.

As we argue in several other studies, Christians are not to observe any religious holidays that have been invented by people. Thus, Christians are forbidden from participating in superstitious worship or superstitious activities on state-sponsored religious holidays. No Christian should observe a Jewish, Muslim, African tribal religion, or Roman Catholic holiday in a religious manner. Nor can a Christian participate in Emperor worship or other idolatry. A Christian must refrain from all the religious superstitions of humanly-invented holidays.

However, that does not mean that you cannot observe a cultural holiday, including state-sponsored religious holidays, in any way. It is reasonable for employers and schools to grant vacation so that we can have time off to take care of our homes, automobiles, and families, to travel, and to rest. It is also reasonable for the state, employers, or schools, to observe holidays so that many family members may all be off work and school at the same time so as to allow travel, vacations, and family reunions.

A Christian should never feel that his conscience is bound by God to do anything special on a cultural holiday. There is nothing holy or sacred about holidays, unless they are appointed by God in His Word. Thus, we should never feel bound by any superstitious rituals or beliefs pertaining to a holiday; rather, we only should keep the day in a God-honoring way.

God warns us not to be “conformed to this world” but to be “transformed by the renewing” of our minds (Romans 12:2). A Christian should never conform his beliefs or practices to those of a pagan or superstitious culture. However, the fact that holidays almost universally have their roots in pagan or religious superstition does not mean that Christians are forbidden from observing the day in any manner whatsoever.

A Christian has the liberty to observe any holiday, as long as he abides by the general principles set forth in Holy Scripture. God commands us to redeem the time, because the days are evil (Eph. 5:16; cf. Col. 4:5). We are to pursue virtue and to flee from vice. Our observance of holidays should demonstrate to the world that we are holy, godly, and set apart to God. Christians are those who have been called out from the world and set apart to God.

Just because Christians are called to be different does not mean that we do not need rest, relaxation, or recreation. Likewise, Christians have work to do outside their ordinary jobs, just like everyone else.

So if you are a Christian, what may you do on a holiday? You may take care of yard work, house work, and chores. You may read, help your children with their homework, and work on your taxes. You may shop. You may sleep in late and enjoy much needed rest. You may exercise, relax, and have fun. You may spend quality time with your family and friends. You may eat cookies or special foods. You may serve others, do good works, and carry out the work of ministry. You may pray, read Scripture, and worship God. You may do anything that you would do on any other day of the year.

Despite the fact that Christ has given us much freedom in life, we must always be careful to use our liberty properly. Paul warns, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13).

Thus, in the midst of enjoying a cultural holiday, we must be careful to refrain from vice, to refrain from sinful temptations and behaviors: gluttony, drunkenness, materialism, covetousness, idolatry, laziness.

Regardless of how we choose to spend our time on holidays, we must always seek to live every holiday and every day to the glory of the one, true God.

“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

All to the glory of God.

Excellence in all things, and all things to God’s glory.

That should be our motto.

If we seek to live each day to God’s glory, redeeming the time, then we will work hard, be diligent, and seek to please God. We are called to have as our ambition “to be pleasing to Him” (2 Corinthians 5:9).

Life is short. There is so much to do and so little time. When you observe a holiday or take a vacation from your ordinary labors, you should thank the Lord for this time He has provided—whether to take care of yard work, house work, and car repairs; to nurture family relationships; or to serve Christ more fully through the Church and in love and good works.

That, after all, is the most fulfilling labor that a Christian can do—to lay up treasure in heaven and not just earthly achievements. Jesus said in the sermon on the mount,

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19-21).

He added, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

As the British missionary C.T. Studd famously wrote, “Only one life, ‘twill soon be past; only what’s done for Christ will last.”

Holidays are significantly rooted in religious superstition and a desire by the world to work as little as possible. Yet, God does not command us to go to school or work the same job six days per week, every week. Therefore, we may observe cultural holidays, as a day of rest and relaxation, but especially as a day of labor for the Lord and His kingdom.