

TEXARKANA REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH**SERIES TITLE: CHURCH ATTENDANCE | SERMON TITLE: SUNDAY WORK****DAVE WAGNER**

Why I'm not a Sabbatarian

We're looking at the issue of church attendance, and one of the most common obstacles to regular attendance is working on Sunday. Working on Wednesday evening is also an issue since we have our midweek meeting then; but for this sermon I'll be focusing on Sunday work. To begin I need to explain to you why I'm not a Sabbatarian. A Sabbatarian is someone who observes Sunday as the Christian Sabbath; or at least they think they do. So here's why I'm not a Sabbatarian:

God made the world in six days and rested on the seventh. From that time he made the seventh day special as a commemoration of his creative activity. In the law of Moses God requires Israel to rest on the seventh day as a Sabbath observance. They were prohibited from working, making others work, cooking, and travelling too far from home.

When Christ came he refused to fit into the pharisaical thinking on Sabbath. But what's surprising is that as he did it, he showed that Sabbath was never absolutely binding anyway, since it was part of the ceremonial law, and ceremonial law was not and is not absolute. So, for example, King David ate the showbread which was not lawful for any to eat but priests. In the same way Jesus did things on Sabbath which, strictly speaking, a man ought not to do.

Later we have Paul, who makes explicit that the church need not observe Sabbath. In Romans 14 Paul places the observance of holy days into the category of indifferent matters; one observes a day, another regards every day alike; let everyone be persuaded in his own mind.

Then, in Colossians 2, Paul warns about false teaching which binds people to the observance of Sabbaths. Sabbath observance is only a shadow, says Paul, but the substance belongs to Christ. Sabbath is a shadow; Christ is the man standing in the midday sun, casting the shadow. Sabbath is a tiny picture; Christ is the reality. Plain enough.

But how does the connection between Sabbath and Christ work? How does Sabbath picture Christ? The writer of Hebrews explains it for us in Hebrews 4. Sabbath was about men resting from their work, but it pointed forward to the spiritual reality of men resting from their dead works by believing in Christ. Whoever believes in Christ, says Hebrews, enters that rest. Keeping a holy day is irrelevant. Believing in Christ is the point, the substance.

So, we live in the New Covenant, and we are absolutely required to keep Sabbath, by command of almighty God: Repent of your dead works, believe in Christ as your sacrifice and high priest! That's how you keep Sabbath. We who believe enter that rest, and we can do it any and every day of the week.

What is the conclusion? Christians are not required to observe a seventh day Sabbath, or any day Sabbath. Seventh-day observance is as gone as circumcision and blood-sacrifices. So much for Sabbath.

But then we have a new consideration at the end of the New Testament. In the Revelation, John tells us he was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day. What exactly is the Lord's Day? John doesn't tell us and neither does any other biblical writer. The Christian leaders after the Apostles tell us it's Sunday. But how do we know they're right? The fact is, we don't know what the Lord's Day is because Scripture doesn't tell us.

Maybe John meant Saturday Sabbath; after all, he was a Jew and he would have lived much of his life observing Sabbath. Maybe he did mean Sunday; that's the day the Lord rose from the dead.

But the one thing we know for certain is that there is zero evidence that the Jewish Sabbath turned into the Christian Sunday observance, such that Sunday is the new Sabbath. For this idea there is zero biblical evidence.

But if that is so, then no Christian can ever tell another Christian that working on Sunday (or any day) is sinful. And so I do not say working on Sunday is sinful, in itself alone.

Now that's a long way to say that the following warning about working on Sunday does not derive from Dave's hidden Sabbatarianism. I do have a warning. But it has nothing to do with the Sabbath.

A Warning to those who Work on Sunday

Sunday isn't the Sabbath, and it isn't a sin to work on Sunday; so, many Christians leave the matter there and assume they can work on Sunday all they want, miss church all they want, and it doesn't matter at all. But that is very foolish thinking.

Sunday isn't the Sabbath but it is the primary meeting day of the Christian church. That means it is our primary day to conduct the business of the Great Commission and our corporate spiritual development.

Do you know what happened to you the day you were saved? Jesus enlisted you in his army. He drafted you to serve him in his purpose to disciple the nations. But discipling the nations requires time and effort. How will you give the necessary time and effort to this mission if work constantly prevents you from coming to church?

And Jesus brought you into a new life of spiritual growth. The Christian is a man busy becoming a new creature. One of the central means of that "Becoming" is church fellowship with all it entails. So how exactly do you plan to continue this process of "Becoming" when work prevents you from using one of the central means of that "Becoming"?

Someone will respond: "But Dave, you said it wasn't a sin to miss church because of work on Sunday! I have a legitimate excuse for missing church!"

I agree. It's not a sin and work is (or can be) a legitimate excuse for missing church. But listen closely to me: Whether your excuse for missing church is legitimate or not, know for certain that regularly missing church increases your spiritual danger. There is a blessing to be had in the communion of saints and you are constantly missing it. In this respect, it doesn't matter whether your excuse is legitimate or not. "Legitimate" will not prevent the spiritual fallout.

Whether we like it or not, we are forced to conclude the Christian who works regularly on Sunday significantly diminishes his participation in the mission which he took upon himself at conversion. He also puts himself at greater risk for Satan's attacks, temptation to sin, and even apostasy. It is also undeniable that he reduces the spiritual strength he could have.

And we can go further. Regularly missing church for work raises questions concerning the man's devotion to Christ. A large part of our devotion to Christ is expressed in our devotion to the church. Lack of devotion to the church reveals lack of devotion to Christ.

Now this isn't true of everyone who works on Sunday. Some men work on Sunday because they really do have little or no choice in the matter. Their heart desires Christ and the fellowship of the

saints. They come to church every time they can; they look for other opportunities to have meaningful fellowship with Christians. They are diligent in Bible study and personal prayer; they are working to deny self and sin and grow in righteousness. I don't say this person lacks in devotion to Christ.

But another man works on Sunday even though he really doesn't have to; he could suffer a little less pay, a little less comfortable schedule, and have his Sunday morning free. But the truth is money and comfort and personal ambition are uppermost in his affections, not Christ. And so he continues absenting himself from church for work's sake, not because he really has to, but because he sinfully chooses to.

For this man, his devotion to church and to Christ is called into question by his absences. This man should be very worried. The fact is, many people have begun their apostasy from Christ by an apostasy from church.

As a final consideration, missing church for work can also communicate ungodly notions to those around the man, say his wife and children or those who respect him. The fact that he is willing to work on Sunday and miss the church meeting, indicates that church is not his highest priority.

But does this fit with his claim to believe the church is the redeemed community of the living God, bought with the blood of God's Son and filled with God's Spirit? If the church is really so sublime a reality, how can the man bear to significantly diminish his participation in it? It looks like his actions and words aren't lining up.

What should be done?

So what is the conclusion? What should a man do if he works on Sunday?

He should seek a way to stop working on Sunday. A schedule change, a job change, or whatever. Every Christian should do all within their power to avoid working during the basic meeting times of the church.

And further: Parents: You should counsel your children to choose careers which leave them free to participate fully in church. When we have young people in the church exploring different careers, we should caution them against careers which will remove them from church meetings.

Every Christian should know for certain that the ideal is freedom to meet weekly with the church. And we should all be wary of anything, career or otherwise, that gets in the way.

Some will be surprised to hear me say this. Am I really condemning the numerous legitimate careers which require Sunday work? Nope, not condemning. But I am speaking plainly about what we all know to be true, whether we are comfortable saying it or not. The coming of Christ has created a new situation. The time is short. Is it really proper for Christians to disregard church attendance in a cavalier manner, as if any time vocation and church conflict, vocation wins hands down?

Actually, I'm telling you to let the dead bury their own dead, if at all possible. Is it really that radical a suggestion to let the spiritually dead handle the careers that interfere with church? Seems like a perfect arrangement to me. They love not the Lord Jesus Christ, and we benefit from their Sunday work in various ways, while we go on worshiping the Lord on Sundays. It's a win-win situation.

Do you see there's an urgency to the mission of Christ that is constantly forgotten when this subject arises? The young feel like life will never end. The old know better. Maybe you've heard the famous poem by the missionary C.T. Studd:

"Only one life; 'twill soon be past,
only what's done for Christ will last."

Even so, I do not say working on Sunday is unlawful. But I trust you see something can be lawful and yet very unhelpful.

But what if a man cannot get free to come to church? What if, for whatever reason, he simply cannot change his job or his schedule and he must miss church regularly?

In this case the man must know he is at a spiritual disadvantage. He must compensate for this disadvantage by strict practice of personal bible study and prayer, as well as family worship. He must seek to fellowship with other believers each week to make up for missing the church fellowship. He must get by other means what he is missing when he works on Sunday.

He should also be diligent to listen or read the teachings given at church which he misses. This is because these teachings are given by his pastors, and they are designed especially with this membership, himself included, in mind. The weekly teachings of this church are designed to pastor this membership. He is a Christian and he needs pastoring, so he should keep up with what is being preached.

To put it in a silly way, the man who comes each week to church can afford to be more lax in his personal devotion than the man who misses church regularly for work. Of course no one should be lax, but you get the point ☺ The man who misses regularly cannot get away with as much in the way of spiritual laxness. He must be doubly on top of his personal devotion, holiness and informal fellowship.

Summary

Let's summarize: Working on Sunday doesn't put a man in sin, but it does put him at a spiritual disadvantage. He should avoid it if at all possible. If not possible, he must compensate by strict personal devotion and by seeking out meaningful fellowship with Christians throughout the week.