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KEEPING GOD IN OUR VACATIONS

Patrick Swayne

The Christian commits to keeping God in every aspect of his or her life because he or she was “bought at a price” (1 Corinthians 6:20). In fact, given Paul’s instruction to do all that we do in the authority of Jesus (Colossians 3:17), we really need to keep every aspect of our life in God. As summertime rolls around, it would be wise for us to have a look at how can avoid taking a vacation from our relationship with God when we go on vacation.

It would be good to begin by figuring out what the Bible says about vacations. The immediate answer, as you might have guessed, is nothing. The idea of working class people travelling for extended periods of time purely for recreation sake is a pretty new concept in the world and a privilege of a richly blessed country such as ours. However, just because the Bible doesn’t speak directly about something doesn’t mean that the Bible is totally silent on the matter. There are several principles that we can extract from God’s word that would apply to vacations.

An account from the life of Christ shows us that it is not wrong to take a trip for the sake of recreation. The Bible provides an interesting detail from the life of Jesus that bears considering. In the middle of a period of public preaching and teaching, we find that Jesus “sent the multitudes away,” including His disciples (Matthew 14:22). He then “went up on the mountain by Himself to pray” (Matthew 14:23). We know why Jesus prayed, but why did He go up on a mountain? His eventual plan was to meet the disciples miraculously on the sea (v. 24-33), so the mountain trip had no obvious purpose. However, when we realize that Jesus lived as a human being and that He understands our feelings (Hebrews 4:15), we can speculate as to why Jesus chose a mountain as a place to pray – Jesus made the trip for recreation.

Recreation is not just about having fun – you can see that in the above example from Jesus. He went upon the mountain **to pray** – God was at least part of the trip and arguably was at the heart of the trip. Jesus chose the mountain not just because He liked hiking, but because it was a good place for Him to pray. There was some value in going to the mountain – He could have found a quiet spot in which to pray by the lake (where He already was) if He wanted – but the value of the trip wasn’t exclusively in the mountain. Recreation is about re-creation – getting yourself into a frame of mind to continue your service to God, keeping God in the picture the whole time.

An important principle to add to the above is the principle of keeping God’s people in mind. As Acts 20 opens up, Paul’s travel plans are interrupted because of a Jewish plot against him (Acts 20:3). Rather than go to Syria, he determined to go to Jerusalem through Macedonia (vv. 3, 16). With this change in plans, we learn that Paul now “was hurrying” (v. 16) in a time when travel did not happen quickly. And yet, we find that Paul purposefully stayed for seven days at Troas (v. 6) – why? Evidently so that he could worship there with the disciples on Sunday (v. 7).

Three principles emerge from the examples of Jesus and Paul. First, recreation is not sinful – taking a trip to enjoy God’s creation, to spend time with our family, or to take a break from

working is not wrong – in fact, God even commanded periods of rest under the Law of Moses. Second, recreational time needs to keep God in the picture and ideally at the heart of what is done – nothing is as “re-creating” as time spent in spiritually beneficial activities. Third, and this is important, all travel plans need to keep God’s people in mind.

As you plan your family vacations for this summer, try to envision how God can be at the heart of what you do. At the very least, make sure that you spend Sunday with God’s people. While you’ll truly be blessed if you plan your vacations around cities and towns where Christians live, if you’re vacationing in a place where there are no New Testament Christians assembling for worship, make sure that you don’t shortchange your family or God. Taking five minutes (or less) to eat crackers and grape juice as a family is not enough to honor the Lord; if the Lord usually gets three hours of your time on Sunday, make sure He gets **at least** that much time when you find yourself forced to worship as a family. The internet, with downloadable sermons and worship services, can help.

Be safe as you travel this summer, but be safer still by keeping God in your travel plans.