

# G P S

## For Grandparents, Parents and Seniors

By Rick Shrader

---

### Working While Walking

Labor Day in America falls on the first Monday of September. Americans don't seem to care what a certain holiday commemorates, they just enjoy the day off—hence the oxymoron, Labor Day Holiday. Christians have a stewardship from God to labor but we often don't pay proper attention to what that means. Genesis 1:1-5, the first day of creation, reminds us that God was at work in the world. God “worked” six days, “and He rested on the seventh day from all the work which He had done” (Gen 2:2). He set the example for work as well as rest.

#### God's Innate Dominion

God has rightful dominion over His own creation. As God, He is eternal as well as omnipotent. “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God” (Psa 90:1). God did not need to create a world with life in it. He did it for His own glory and enjoyment. He has innate dominion over it all. “Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations” (Psa 145:13).

God is the owner and sustainer of His world. He owes no man but all creation is owing to Him. “Who has preceded Me, that I should repay him? Everything under heaven is Mine” (Job 41:11). Paul said, “Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever, Amen.” (Rom 11:35-36). God sustains His own creation as well. He “upholds all things by the word of His power (Heb 1:3). “All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist” (Col 1:16-17).

#### Man's Delegated Dominion

Recently Kevin Bauder wrote, “God's plan was never to govern the world immediately. Rather, He created intermediaries who would do the work of governing on His behalf. He intended to fill the world with these God-like creatures who would continuously bring creation to higher and higher levels of order. These creatures would not have the power to create out of nothing, but they would have the ability to take the pre-existing materials of the world and to arrange those materials so as to force them to become more useful.” (*Nick of Time*, 8/9/24)

C.S. Lewis once called that delegated dominion the “dignity of causality.” The Psalmist asked, “What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For you have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet” (Psa 8:4-6). This is an area where we have continuity with Adam, the Psalmist, and every other human being. We are stewards of God's creation. We are not to abuse it nor to worship it.

One area where we have a certain discontinuity with all of our ancestors is in the dominion God gave Christians in the local church. The church is a small island in the sea of humanity and creation where we have a unique stewardship. Our labor here is also delegated to us in the New Testament and one in which we have dominion as believers, in the world and yet different from the world. With one step we are planting and watering actual seed and dirt on God's earth, and with the next step we are sowing and watering the seed of the gospel, fulfilling our delegated dominion.

## Paul the Tentmaker

The apostle Paul was a “tentmaker” (Acts 18:3). This expression is commonly used of bi-vocational ministers who pastor and must also support themselves by working in a secular job. Paul came by it naturally. When brought before the Council after his arrest in Jerusalem (Acts 21), he said, “I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel” (Acts 22:3). Paul says three things here. 1) He was born in Tarsus, the capital city of the province of Cilicia in Asia Minor. This is a beautiful Mediterranean city on the southern shore of Pamphylia in Galatia. 2) By “this city” Paul means Jerusalem where he learned Rabbinic law, a “Pharisee of a Pharisee.” 3) He was “brought up” under the tutelage of Gamaliel (of the school of Hillel), and, as customary, went off to Rabbinical school as a young teenager and was therefore raised in Jerusalem.

After his familiar conversion story, Paul went back to Tarsus for eleven years (Acts 9:30; Gal 1:21). Carson and Moo record, “Paul’s native town may also have led him into his trade. A local product, *cilicium*, was used to make tents, and Luke tells us that Paul was himself a ‘tentmaker’ (Acts 18:3). This is presumably the trade that Paul pursued during his missionary work in order not to burden the churches with his support (e.g., 1 Thess. 2:9).” (*Introduction*, 355). It seems the province of *Cilicia* was so-called because of the *cilicium* produced in that region. Homer Kent adds, “Paul stayed with Aquila and Priscilla and engaged in labor with them for they were all ‘tentmakers.’ The term *skēnopoioi* was commonly used of leather-workers. The province of Cilicia from which Paul came was noted for the production of a cloth made from goats’ hair called *cilicium*, and perhaps this was Paul’s manual skill” (Acts, 142).

Paul’s home of Tarsus in Cilicia gave him the advantage of being a Roman citizen (something his family had purchased and he was born into) and also learning a trade. This bi-vocational ability profited him during his Rabbinic years but more importantly during his apostolic years. It led him to Aquila’s house and their ministry partnership. It allowed him to either receive support from churches (from Philippi, Phil. 4:15) or to keep from being a burden to churches that could not afford to support him (the Ephesian church, Acts 20:34 and the Corinthian church, 1 Cor. (9:4-14).

Tents were popular and necessary in the Bedouin times and tentmaking became a lucrative profession. There were other popular professions, especially fishing. Peter and Andrew, James and John (and father Zebedee) were fishermen around the sea of Galilee. Tax collecting was not popular (“Hello, I’m from the Roman government and I’m here to help”) but Levi, a Jew (and later Zacchaeus), used this trade as income. Joseph was a carpenter and the only thing we know about Jesus during most of His life growing up was that He was also a carpenter (Matt. 13:55) probably of stone and wood. When Jesus would say, “Take My yoke upon you,” I’m sure it would have been an analogy referring to His own beautiful hand-made yokes!

What we see in the inspired history of the early church is that working with our hands is an honorable thing. “That you aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we command you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing” (1 Thes 4:11-12). In fact, Paul will go on to say, “For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither will he eat” (2 Thes 3:10). Sometimes the only choice is to either work or starve. Beyond the necessity of our own bodily needs, Paul says, “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” (Eph 4:28). Ministers and churches cannot minister unless God’s people have learned to be productive in some labor that they may be able to give to the ministry.

The Bible also has the words “tent” and “tabernacle,” both coming from the same root word, *skēnos* and *skēnē*. Both Paul and Peter referred to our physical bodies as tents (2 Cor 5:1, 4; 2 Pet 1:13, 14) and both references are speaking primarily of death when we put away our tents and look forward to a house not made with hands. In this sense we are all “tentmakers.” God has given us human bodies in which to live and move and be productive. These tents are also the temples of the very Spirit of God (1 Cor 6:19-20). We must also be good stewards of our physical bodies. We cannot abuse it nor worship it. This too is our mandate. “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thes 5:23).