



**January 31, 2008**

## **THE OPTIONAL COMMANDMENT**

The other day I was playing a tennis match that wasn't going my way. In this particular case, it wasn't that my opponent was a better player than me if I was on my game, but it was one of those days that I simply wasn't. My timing was off, my feet felt like cinder blocks, and I wasn't seeing the ball well. As the match unfolded, so did my frustration. Finally, late in the second set after a particularly frustrating moment, I yelled out at the top of my lungs, "Jesus Christ". Fortunately, the match ended shortly thereafter. Driving away from the courts, I consoled myself by considering that my opponent was lucky he caught me on a bad day; normally I'd beat him. I pondered how good I am at tennis as I comforted myself with a little bit of self worship. My thoughts were interrupted when I passed McDonald's and decided to grab a soda via the drive-through lane. While I was waiting on my turn at the window, I couldn't take my eyes off the vehicle in front of me – one sweet looking Mustang. It had all the bells and whistles. I imagined myself cruising around in that machine and after a while my thoughts about the Mustang took on a life of its own as I was fantasizing about owning one and feeling jealous that I didn't have one that called my garage, home. When it was finally my turn I pulled up to the window and wow . . . the young lady was beautiful. The Mustang was immediately an afterthought as I stared at her. The best part was when she walked away from the window to get my food and I got to see her from behind. Nice. Then, would you believe it, when she gave me my change, I saw that she gave me a dollar too much, but I drove off anyway because if she isn't smart enough to give me the right change, I'm going to keep it. I'm sure McDonald's has underpaid my change before anyway. It will all come out in the wash. I was starting to feel better again as I drove home. I guess the thoughts of the Mustang, looking at that young lady, and making a buck were all some sort of balm to my bruised ego. My favorite song came on the radio about the time mom called my cell phone. In my attempt to keep the phone call short so I could listen to the song, I was unkind to my mother, but I figured I'd make it up to her by being really nice the next time we spoke. Before I knew it, I was home and it was only 10am on a Saturday morning; I still had the entire day ahead of me. Life was good.

3. 2. 10. 7. 8. 5. That would be the order in which I violated the 10 Commandments in my fictional story. You recognized each violation even as you were reading the story, and you knew it was sin. Let's pretend for a moment the story was true, and you confronted me over my sin. What if my defense was that I almost always keep those commandments, but once in a while I take a break. Since I almost always keep those commandments, surely the Lord wouldn't mind my taking a break once in a while. What if I claimed that the Bible never defines what "blasphemy" actually looks like in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. What if I claimed that NEVER lusting after another woman was legalistic. You would shake your head and be deeply concerned about my walk with the Lord. You would be right.

No doubt we think the 10 Commandments are truly commands and in effect 100% of the time; that is of course, except for one. For reasons unknown to me and without a shred of biblical support, some believers give themselves “get out of jail free” cards when it comes to number four: Honor the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Herewith are reasons people at NEHBC really have given me for missing worship in the past 12 months. By the way, I never asked these people why they missed worship; they offered their remarks to me without solicitation.

1. “I was taking a break.” (Which commandment may I take a break from this week?)
2. “I had to play golf with a client who is in town.” (So, if he wants to get dinner at Hooter’s, are you going to accommodate that also (#7)? Or does the client just get to convince you to dishonor the Sabbath (#4)?)
3. “We were really tired from a long week at work.” (Hmmm . . . so, you were too tired to give the Lord the time He wants because you were giving your boss the time she wanted?)
4. “It’s hunting season.” (Funny how we’ll hunt on God’s time without flinching but we won’t hunt on our time – vacation days.)
5. “We had family in town.” (So . . . the Lord said, “Spend time with Me” and your family’s presence in your home said, “Spend time with us”, and you looked at both parties and chose . . . )

I could go on, but I won’t. My heart is too sad. Someone might say, “Lino, you are being legalistic.” But, you just said that argument doesn’t fly. I just accused you of being legalistic when you said I couldn’t EVER check out another woman and that the seventh commandment is in effect ALWAYS. So, how is it ok to enforce # 7, but call enforcing # 4 legalistic? Someone might say, “Lino, the Bible doesn’t say I have to go to church on the Sabbath day.” Sure, nor does it say I can’t scream out “Jesus Christ” in frustration on a tennis court, and yet you called that wrong. I’d argue it does say we are to go to corporate worship on the Sabbath day. Someone might say, “The true Sabbath isn’t even on Sunday.” Sure, but the commandment is clear I am to have a Sabbath day every week and that on that day I am to do two things: 1. Worship the Lord 2. Refrain from participating in my full-time occupation. If Sunday isn’t your Sabbath day, pray tell, on what day of the week are you attending corporate worship and refraining from your full- time occupation?

The Sabbath day is in effect as often as the commandments about stealing, adultery, and lying. If you are going to grant exceptions to one, you have to grant exceptions to all of them. On the Sabbath day we are to attend corporate worship. Our excuses for not doing so are hollow. One day we will stand before the Lord and give an account. The good news is, observing the Sabbath is not difficult. It is simply a choice. Just do it. So you are tired; observe the greatest commandment in the Bible and love the Lord with all your strength. That means all. With what little you have left in the tank, get yourself to worship on the Sabbath. You have nothing in the tank on Sunday morning, make better (biblical) choices on the other days of the week so you aren’t so tired on Sunday morning. The commandment says to keep the Sabbath day “holy”. Holy means separate, distinct, unlike any other. We are to view the Sabbath day as separate, distinct, and unlike the other six days of the week. To properly observe the Sabbath, we must plan and prepare for it. It is the highest and greatest day of the week. Let’s at least get our weekly calendars in line with God’s Word.

I want to conclude with a story about a high schooler in our youth group. His parents are divorced. His mother, who knows and loves the Lord, lives 45 minutes away. His father, with whom he lives, has nothing to do with the Lord; however, his father’s house is closest in proximity to the high school and so this young man lives with his lost dad. Consequently, the young man has no spiritual example in the home and, outside of his mother, no spiritual encouragement to walk with the Lord comes from his mother. Still, every Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday evening, you will see a bicycle tied up to a post outside the doors to our church on the south side. To some, it might be an eyesore, but to me, it is one of the greatest forms of encouragement I get. It is Matt’s bicycle. His dad won’t bring

him to worship and youth events, but that doesn't stop Matt. For two years now, he has ridden his bicycle down FM 1960 and down West Lake Houston Parkway, Bible and note pad in his backpack, to get to our church. At least six months a year, Matt shows up at church red in the face from sweating. At least three months a year he shows up red in the face from the cold wind that has bitten his cheeks, nose, and mouth during his bike ride. Some rainy Sundays and Wednesdays he shows up wet, despite his slicker. This is the stuff of which magazine articles are written. Matt loves the Lord Jesus—he doesn't talk much, but watch him, and you'll see it. Matt, without knowing it, is possibly the greatest encourager to me in the entire church. If he isn't the greatest, he is unsurpassed.

By the way, I didn't hear you as you were telling me why you missed worship, I was too busy watching Matt lock up his bike and walk in the door with a big smile on his face. Could you please repeat your reason for why you didn't make it to worship?

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## **BAPTISM**

Well, for the first time in our 5 ½ year history, we baptized inside on Sunday morning. I'm not sure I liked it. I like the idea of baptizing outside the church like we have done facing West Lake Houston Pkwy with all the cars driving by or when we baptize at the YMCA pool. That makes for a true public profession of faith. However, I am torn over the issue and have a bit of a dilemma. On the one hand, when we have a separate baptism service outside the church, it is a true public profession of faith and a true coming out party. On the other hand, the saved but unbaptized tend not to show up. The audience is made up primarily of the baptized. The greatest tool that compels a saved but unbaptized person to be baptized is to see someone baptized, and so if we don't baptize in front of them, we have a problem. And therein lays the dilemma: baptize outside the church for it to be a true public profession of faith and the saved but unbaptized don't come, or baptize inside the church where the unbaptized can see it but it isn't a true public profession of faith.

By the way, please don't send me emails telling me getting baptized in a church service is a "public" setting. If it is public, why is it so easy for us to talk about Jesus inside the church building and yet so difficult to do at work? What goes on inside a church building may be public, but it isn't public.

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## **IMB MEETING**

This week I am in Gainesville, Florida, at a meeting of the International Mission Board's (IMB) Board of Trustees. And by that I mean endless hours of bureaucracy. Meetings start as early as 7am and end as late as 10pm. And there are lots of references to Robert's Rules of Order. Sit on the IMB Board of Trustees and you will get to know Robert really well. ☺ So, why do I do it? First and foremost, it is the duty of a Southern Baptist pastor to serve his local church and our denomination. I believe that Southern Baptist pastors who fail to do both fail in their duty. Why not become independent Baptist? Second, of all the missionary sending agencies in the world, I believe the IMB is the very best. I'm not saying other agencies don't reach the lost, because many of them do. I'm not saying other agencies don't plant churches, because many of them do. I'm not saying other agencies aren't making a difference, because many of them do. But, I do believe that if one takes into account theology, ecclesiology, leadership, structure, funding, and organizational systems and processes, no one matches up to the IMB. And if my sitting in meetings voting on theological, ecclesiological, financial, and leadership issues enables missionaries to be on the field full time winning the lost and discipling the saved, then just tell when the meetings are and I'll be there with pleasure. Working behind the scenes to better facilitate our people

and our work on the front lines is well worth the effort and time.

I'll be back in the pulpit this coming Sunday and I can't wait.

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## **WEDNESDAY NIGHT PREACHING**

Last night Pastor Sonny preached in my absence. I'm glad Pastor Sonny fills in for me more often than not when I am gone. He is a good preacher. Our preaching styles are very different, and I think that presents a nice change of pace when I am gone. However, it is very difficult being in Pastor Sonny's position, when it comes to preaching. Most people consider the pastor's preaching to be a considerable factor in finding a church. For some people, it is just about the only factor. So, the people that come to a church tend to like the style of their pastor's preaching. Now, imagine being the one called upon to preach and you don't have the same preaching style as the pastor? It isn't easy. Yet, Pastor Sonny does an excellent job. (Unless of course you are on a pastor's search committee and you are reading this and then I want you to know he is the worst preacher I've ever heard. I daily question his call to ministry.)

Pastor Sonny's preaching is first of all text driven. He doesn't get an idea from the text and come up with a sermon, he actually picks a text and then stands up and tells the congregation what the text says in the way the text says it. We call that expository preaching. Second, Pastor Sonny does a great job of explaining the text through everyday situations. He has the ability to figure out what a verse says and then explain through everyday life. For example, he may use a situation with a neighbor, a workplace situation, or a church situation to help his audience know what Scripture is saying. Third, I like Pastor Sonny's preaching because he is conversational. He just stands up with an attitude that says, look, I live in the same broken world as you; I face struggles like everyone else, let's look into God's Word and see what it says to us tonight. That makes for a good sermon. I always enjoy listening to his sermons on cd when I get back in town.

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## **NEW ORLEANS MISSION TRIP**

Our team leaves on Saturday and returns Wednesday. Mardi Gras is this weekend and Fat Tuesday is this coming Tuesday. There will be much immorality taking place and in the thick of it will be Pastor Sonny and our team passing out tracts and Bibles and witnessing one on one. Pray for them. Please pray for the following in particular:

- Traveling mercies—pray the van works well and they don't get into a wreck
- Unity—living with each other 24x7 for five days will test anyone's patience and level of support. Pray that our team remains patient with each other, supportive of each other, and focused on the task at hand.
- Spiritual protection—they will be in the midst of much spiritual chaos. On every side will be a battle between the forces of the Lord and the forces of Satan. Pray for our team's spiritual safety.
- Changed lives—pray for lost people to be saved, backslidden believers to repent of their sin, and our team to see the lostness of the world from a deeper perspective.

On Wednesday night, February 6<sup>th</sup>, we will have the team's welcome home party. They will get back in town that same day. We will have a time of singing as a congregation as we rejoice over our team's return and what the Lord did through them. We will listen to a couple of the team members bring us a report on the trip. And then we will have a time of refreshments afterward as we personally welcome the

team home. I can't wait. .