

Strawberry Sundays

Paul C. Semenchuk

My parents were farmers. They believed Sunday was a Christian's day of rest. Sundays should be different. On Sunday, you did only what was absolutely necessary; for example, feed livestock, milk cows.

Harvesting hay and grain? Not on Sunday. Picking fruit and vegetables? Not on Sunday. Those things could/would wait until Monday. Sunday was for church - morning and evening. For Sunday School. For having ministers and missionaries over to enjoy fellowship around a bountiful table. For family rest and relaxation.

By contrast, some of the other Christian farmers would pick strawberries on Sunday. Regularly. Under normal conditions, we would need to pick a field of strawberries every other day. That meant a picking day would fall on a Sunday every other week. And, if you had second field of berries, as many of the farmers did, you could end up harvesting berries every Sunday.

If you didn't pick until the third day, you could expect to find a lot of overripe or rotten berries. That's why, during strawberry season (about five-six weeks), other farmers picked berries on Sunday. Every Sunday. They felt that letting berries get overripe or rot was not good management. Wasteful, when you think in terms of several acres. Consequently, for them, Sunday was not a day of rest, not a day of worship, not a day of Christian fellowship. But, that was their choice.

Ironically, my parents prospered more than those who picked Sunday strawberries. Instead of paying off our farm debt in ten years (as was projected), we paid everything off in three years. And even during the week, we didn't kill ourselves. Worked regular hours. Had time for three leisurely meals each day. Our evenings were free for whatever. Farming was enjoyable. But there was more to life than farming. Farming was a means to an end, not an end in itself.

Don't misunderstand me. We didn't judge others for what they believed they needed to do on Sunday. That was their right and responsibility. But, sometimes, we felt sorry for them. In spite of their sunrise-to-sunset, seven-days-a-week devotion to the land, they were no better off. They tried to save but seemed to lose. Nor did they seem to enjoy what they were doing. We knew that, in these things, we were under Grace and not under the Law.

It was not a matter of legalism. We simply chose a lifestyle that was right for us. By the way, neither we as a family nor any of our hired berry pickers ever found more rotten strawberries on Monday than at any other time of a normal week. It

was as though - for the weekend - God put the ripening process either on "slow" or on "hold." What do *you* think happened?