

# It Is Written

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## Is Your Ox In The Ditch?

By Joe Fitch

"The ox is in the ditch"! Therefore, duty's demands are abruptly dismissed. No one can argue with the "law of the ox in the ditch", can they? But where is that law? The Sabbath law is defined in Exodus 20:8-11: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it" (cp. Exodus 23:12-13; Deuteronomy 5:12-14).

There is no "ox in the ditch" exemption in any of those passages. Where then is it? It's not there! The appeal isn't an argument of rights — of law; it's a plea for mercy. Mercy was the point of Jesus in Luke 14:1-5 when He said, "Now it happened, as he went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath, that they watched Him closely. And behold, there was a certain man before Him who had dropsy. And Jesus, answering, spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?' But they kept silent. And He took him and healed him, and let him go. Then he answered them, saying, 'Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?' And they could not answer Him regarding these things".

The Jew had no "right" to get the ox out of the ditch on the Sabbath day. He plainly violated the law. Mercy and compassion pardoned the violation because of the circumstance. That it was a breach of law isn't ignored. Maybe we should think of this before we make our "ox in the ditch" appeal. We plead guilty to the sin and ask for mercy.

"The ox is in the ditch"! Ah yes, and how did he get there? That makes a difference. The appeal assumes an accident — something not anticipated. This surely can't be used to justify deliberate plans which prevent doing our duty.

"I couldn't be in the assembly because my ox was in the ditch". He had a headache, was groggy-headed, felt terrible, and was in bed all Sunday morning. Sounds sick? He was — after staying up binge-watching a show until 3:30 in the morning. Another brother got "caught on the road" and couldn't "get to the evening assembly". He didn't mention he planned a picnic and a 200-mile sightseeing tour Sunday afternoon. I think I see tracks where the ox was pushed into the ditch! At what point will you take your service to God seriously?

"My ox is in the ditch! I'm so busy I just can't attend Bible studies and do spiritual work like I should". And he isn't lying. His candle is burning at both ends — he doesn't have time for anything else. He has two jobs, PTA, FFA, 4-H, Little League, hunting/fishing, and a busy social schedule. No time is left, but it's no accident. Those commitments were all planned. That ox didn't stumble into the ditch — he had help.

"I'll have to cut my giving — my ox is in the ditch. I can hardly pay my bills". True! New car, TV, house, boat, etc., takes all the money. It seems the Lord should've been considered first; nevertheless, whose name is at the bottom of those credit applications? I doubt the ox signed a single one of them! Someone asked for every payment. The ox was pushed into the ditch.

And how long should the ox stay in the ditch? Is this every Sabbath's plea? That makes a difference. We may foolishly put our ox in the ditch, but we should promptly get him out. A brother or sister explains that their job has interfered with their duty — ox in the ditch. They don't mention that this is the ordinary demands of their job and it'll be this way their whole working life. Brother or sister, pull the ox out! Brethren,

our plans must be to do what's right — to be dependable in performing our duty. Interruptions should be temporary and unavoidable. Worse than a failure to measure up is planning to fail. Where's your ox?

## Doing The Really Hard Things

By Greg Gwin

There are some difficult things that God commands us to do. It's hard, for example, to go to a brother or sister who has sinned, look them in the eye, and tell them that they have to repent, like Peter did with Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:22). It would be much easier to simply look the other way, but God says we must go to them (Luke 17:3).

It's hard to approach a weak Christian, point out their serious neglect of duty, and urge them to turn back to God. You might know of someone like Demas who could be turned away from the world (2 Timothy 4:10). It would be easier to just let it slide, but God says we must speak to them (Galatians 6:1).

It's hard to finally withdraw yourself from a disciple who has sinned and refuses to repent. And we all recognize that it's especially hard when it's family. It would be easier to ignore the situation and act as though nothing had happened, but God says such action must be taken (1 Timothy 6:3-5).

To all of you who obediently do these difficult things, we express our thanks and admiration. You help Christ's cause in an immense way. You are truly "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Matthew 5:13-16). You have shown yourself to be "blameless and harmless" and "without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation" (Philippians 2:14).

Now, may we say a word to those of you who might be on the receiving end of such actions? We hope that you understand that your brothers and sisters definitely take no delight in doing such things. It gives them no perverse sense of pleasure. There's no morbid gratification that comes from this. Surely you can see that this is truly difficult.

Your fellow Christians can think of a thousand things they would rather be doing. There's absolutely no enjoyment in this. But they do it anyway, because they know two things. First, God commands them to do so. Second, it's in your best interest. Please try to understand this, and if it becomes necessary for someone to come to you — in a conscientious effort to serve God and you — please respect them for it. Respect them, appreciate them, and love them for their deep concern for your spiritual well-being. They're doing one of the really hard things that God calls on His people to do.

## *This Hope You Have?*

By Brady Cook

Numerous times in the New Testament, Paul would use the word "hope" to signify the life to come (Romans 8:25; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; Titus 1:2). This word is fitting for more than one reason, not the least of which is due to the fact that none of us have ever seen the place that is to come. It is something longed for, desired, and expected to come after the pain of this life is over. Moses, with a similar mind as Paul, desired only to be able to see the land that he labored so long for.

However, God had something far better for His servant than a physical Canaan, not allowing him to enter because of his unfaithfulness at the waters of Meribah. But these men would not have been able to have this expectation of a better life had they not worked in this life. Hebrews 4:1 calls this hope a "rest." Now tell me this: how can one rest from something for which they have not worked? Rather, the rest is our reward for the labor that we do in this life. While denominationalism will teach that faith is all you need to be saved, or that once you are baptized you can take it easy (e.g., "once saved, always saved"), this is clearly not what the Bible teaches. God wants a worker in this life so he can have a restful soul in the life to come. The only question left is: have you been working?