

Are You Lazy?

Proverbs 26:13-16; Luke 12:20

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God calls you to be diligent, faithful, and steadfast in the work which we are appointed to do—whether work that is mental or work that is physical, whether work that is secular or work that is spiritual. God would have you to apply yourself in earnestly exerting your energy to do the will of God from a willing and joyful heart for God's glory (Ecclesiastes 9:10). Thus, diligence as defined here is specifically a Christian grace ("to do the will of God for God's glory"). Non-Christians may be hard workers, but they cannot have the Christian grace of diligence.

However, there are two sinful extremes that must be avoided if you would be diligent to the glory of God. The first is the sinful extreme of addiction or servitude to one's work so that one works for work's sake—so that work becomes an end in itself. There may be workaholics just as there are alcoholics who work themselves into an early grave, finding no rest and relaxation from it day or night (Ecclesiastes 2:22-23; Hebrews 4:9; Revelation 14:11,13). Dear ones, all that we do should have as an end the glory of God and should benefit yourself and others. For this reason lawful recreation is necessary and beneficial in order that you might not drift to this extreme, but rather rest your mind and your body from your work, so that you might be even more diligent and faithful in the work God calls you to do (whether that lawful recreation be soothing music as in 1 Samuel 16:16; archery as in 1 Samuel 20:35; riddles as in Judges 14:14; or bodily exercise as in 1 Timothy 4:8, or many other forms of lawful recreation).

The second sinful extreme you must avoid is allowing your pleasures (even lawful recreations) to so occupy your mind and your time that you are so wearied from them or so consumed with them that you are not able to fulfil your lawful callings with godly diligence, faithfulness, or steadfastness. When you live to fulfil your pleasures and recreations rather than to fulfil your lawful callings to the glory of God, you have drifted into a sinful extreme which will lead to your own poverty in body and soul (Proverbs 21:17).

Dear ones, one apparent sin which keeps Christians from being diligent in their lawful work and tasks is that of laziness or slothfulness. One who is lazy in all his/her ways is called a sluggard. Laziness is a sin which all of us find so unattractive and appalling when we see it in the lives of others. But as in so many areas of our lives, we seem to see sin so much more clearly in the lives of others than we do in our own lives. Today may the Holy Spirit shine the light of His Word upon all instances of laziness in our own lives for who among us does not to some degree manifest this sin? Just as Christians are not unbelieving fools, but may be foolish to varying degrees, so Christians are not unbelieving sluggards, but may be lazy to varying degrees. As God's children who are united to Christ by faith alone, you may be a bruised reed or a smoking flax, but Christ will not break you nor extinguish your faith in Him even though it seems to smoke at times rather than burning brightly. He will put His almighty hands around the smoking flax that it not be entirely extinguished. May God, therefore, cause you to so despise the sin of laziness and to exert all spiritual energy and grace to uproot it wherever it shows its ugly face.

From our text this Lord's Day, God teaches us through the wisest man who ever lived, Solomon, four characteristics of the lazy person: (1) He Procrastinates out of Fear (Proverbs 26:13); (2) He Loves His Pleasure (Proverbs 26:14); (3) He Finds His Duty to Be a Burden (Proverbs 26:15); (4) He Is Proud (Proverbs 26:16).

I. He Procrastinates out of Fear (Proverbs 26:13).

A. What is laziness? It is not the same thing as being deliberate, careful, or even slow in one's work. In fact, one who is quick and fast in accomplishing a task may do so because he primarily has in view a desire to spend most of his time in his lazy pleasure and ease. Laziness is a sinful attitude or practice which moves us to despise or neglect our lawful work to which God has called us. It may be manifested in our desires, our words, and in our actions.

1. Let me make clear that one is not lazy who is either resting or convalescing due to some illness when his desire/goal is to get back on his feet so that he might be diligent and faithful in his calling.

2. Neither is one lazy who is recreating or refreshing himself due to physical or mental exhaustion, but desires to be more effective in his calling due to his being refreshed.

3. Even after retirement, one must not retire from lawful work in some way (lawful work being that which glorifies God and benefits himself and others) so as to spend the rest of his life in self-centered pleasure. All lawful work that we do (whether before or after retirement) should in fact bring us joy in this respect: knowing that we glorify God and profit ourselves and others by it.

B. The lazy person is one who makes excuses and even lies as to why he can't do what he should do. The excuses and lies may sound as ridiculous as the one stated in Proverbs 26:13: There is a lion waiting to tear me apart if I venture out on the streets to go to work. Dear ones, you may procrastinate in fulfilling a promise, in completing an assignment, or in making a difficult phone call because what is right to do is very difficult to do, and you would rather make an excuse (or even lie) in order to avoid performing your duty. You may not want to be stretched beyond that with which you are comfortable. But God intends such duties and such work to be not for your destruction but for your sanctification.

1. I believed strongly that God had called me to preach the gospel, and yet I was so uncomfortable (even frightened) to speak publicly. By God's grace and His perseverance I began to look for and accept every opportunity I had to speak publicly (even though my voice quaked and my whole body felt like it was shaking in some violent spasm).

2. Dear ones, God is far more concerned with your character than with your comfort. The lazy person says, "It's better to lie than to do what is hard." The lazy person says, "I can't do it." The diligent, faithful Christian who perseveres by God's grace in fulfilling the will of God says, "With God all things are possible. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

C. The sluggard may herein be seen to be a coward. Rather than facing difficult and trying circumstances at work, with family or friends, he will take the easy way out and come up with some imaginary ghost that prevents him from pursuing the will of God for his sanctification. He fears the confrontation with that person or situation more than he trusts the living God who is able to deliver him out of the mouth of even real lions as He did Daniel (in Daniel 6) or out of the mouth of figurative lions as He did Paul (2 Timothy 4:17). Dear ones, it is not those who are diligent in seeking to do God's will that should fear the lion, but those who are lazy and irresponsible in doing God's will (1 Kgs. 13:7ff; 1 Peter 5:8).

1. The future frightens the sluggard into procrastinating and making all kinds of excuses as to why he should not set godly goals for his life and set out in Christ's power to reach them. The lazy person would rather stay in his house where he thinks he is safe (although he is unable to escape the fears that keep him in the house), than step outside and face those fears head on trusting in the promises of God to close the mouths of those fearful lions (consider the ten spies vs. the Joshua and Caleb in Numbers 13:31-33; 14:7-9).

2. If in stepping out of the house in dependence upon Christ in order to face those fears, you fall or do not do as well as you had hoped you would, you have not failed—you have fallen and will by God's grace persevere in standing up again to face that fear until at last you finally and perfectly overcome all your fears in God's presence (Proverbs 24:16). You have only failed when you refuse to get up, repent, and

renew your obedience to Christ. As those who have been adopted by God through faith in Jesus Christ, you have been set free from all such fears that choke you and paralyze you (2 Timothy 1:7).

D. Dear ones, are you one to make excuses time and time again why you haven't fulfilled this or that appointed task or duty? Do you make excuses for your sins? Are you afraid to covenant with the Lord to overcome that sin because you have fallen so many times before? Do you make excuses for your laziness in applying the means of God's grace in your life: secret worship, family worship, prayer, the Word, the Sabbath? Dear ones, confess your sins of procrastination and of fear in being diligent to do the will of God and embrace the promise found in Psalm 91:13-16. Let no fear of pain, affliction, persecution, or isolation keep you, dear ones, from diligently (though not perfectly) doing what you know to be the will of God.

II. He Loves His Pleasure (Proverbs 26:14).

A. Here is a graphic picture of the sluggard who like a door on the hinge turns continually from one side in his bed to the other side, but never makes it out of bed to do what he knows to be the will of God.

1. So the slothful person always finds that he is too busy with his own pleasures to do what pleases the Lord. This is not a condemnation of rest, sleep, or lawful recreation, but rather a judgment against an excess and abuse to the neglect of that which is our duty.

2. For example, you know it is your duty to get a good night's sleep because your work tomorrow will require of you much strength, alertness, patience, and understanding, but you stay up till all hours of the night indulging yourself in your pleasures in exchange for your needed rest. Dear ones, it is laziness when you make yourself unfit for your lawful calling by your overindulgence in your pleasures (Proverbs 21:17).

B. Laziness loves pleasure and its own comfort to such a degree that it will not sacrifice comfort for the cause of Christ or for the sake of righteousness. A lazy person will not suffer for the gospel, but will make whatever compromises necessary to cling tenaciously to his earthly security blankets. The sluggard has no comprehension of the value of that which is heavenly and eternal to that which is earthly and temporal. He will, therefore, willingly sell his spiritual birthright to the kingdom of God for a bowl of soup if it means his present comfort. Those who are slothful may express with their mouths a desire to be holy, but are unwilling to exert the time or energy to be holy. It's just too difficult to take the kingdom of God by a holy violence (Matthew 11:12). It requires too much devotion to Christ. For there is real blood, sweat, and tears exerted in living the Christian life (Galatians 6:17; 1 Corinthians 4:11-13).

C. Dear ones, we are all lazy in various respects and have desired our own comfort over suffering affliction with Christ. Those who are lazy through and through will not be moved from their unbelieving ease. The suffering of Christ, the suffering of the apostles, the suffering of our covenanted forefathers, nor even the suffering of the brethren in the church throughout the world will not move them to suffer in exchange for their present comforts. Beloved, it is promised to all those who suffer for Christ now that they shall be glorified with Christ forever (Romans 8:17). But for those who would be at ease in this life and eat, drink, and be merry, the Lord says, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" (Luke 12:20)?

D. Dear brothers and sisters, be not at ease in Zion, but rather take the Kingdom of God by a holy force as you trust in Christ alone for your eternal salvation and ever exert your time, money, and gifts to promote the cause of Jesus Christ.

III. He Finds His Duty to Be a Burden (Proverbs 26:15).

A. In this picture we find the sluggard unwilling to move his cold hands from inside his shirt where it is warm in order to feed himself (Proverbs 20:4). Even such a necessary duty as his daily bread becomes to him a grievous burden to bear.

B. Surely those who are filled with the love of God do not find their love-bound duties to Christ to be a burden too heavy to bear (1 John 5:3; Matthew 11:28-30). Dear ones, whenever your obedience to Christ is drudgery or a misery to you, you have left your first love (Revelation 2:4-5). Love for Christ lifts your burdens and greases the wheels of your obedience. When your obedience becomes a misery to you rather than a joy to you, look to the cross to see what a burden of sin and shame and punishment Christ was willing to bear for you. What a shame when obedience to the Lord is merely duty-bound rather than love-bound (whether in the home, in the church, in the neighborhood, at school, or at work).

IV. He Is Proud (Proverbs 26:16).

A. The very root of laziness is made evident in this verse: pride, conceit, and selfishness. What drives a person to be lazy is essentially his preoccupation with himself. The sluggard cannot be taught anything, for he believes he has acquired great wisdom and has marvelously done so without hardly any mental exertion on his part. He views himself wiser than seven men who can give sound biblical reasons for their advice, counsel, admonitions, and rebukes. But the sluggard doesn't hear, for he is too busy talking about himself or what he thinks he knows to really learn anything. It is the humble person who listens and learns. It is the humble person who thankfully receives correction. It is the humble person who is diligent and able to lead others (Proverbs 12:23-24). If you would lead others, be humble and diligent (even in the small areas of life) not proud and lazy—the one who is faithful in little will be faithful in much. Don't hide the gifts and graces given to you by God, invest them and use them to extend the kingdom of God.

B. Dear ones, laziness is not a mere hindrance to a godly life. It is death to a godly life. By God's grace put it to death lest it put you to sleep or even worse put you to death.

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