

**Ecclesiastes 4: 5 and 6; “A Handful with Quietness”, Sermon # 26 in the series –
“Remember Your Creator”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall,
on July 23rd, 2017, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

So far in this Chapter we have looked at the vanity of oppression and being envied for doing skillful and right work. This afternoon we will look at the vanity of both laziness (what is called idleness) and overwork. There is a problem with them both. They do not bring the lasting satisfaction to our lives that we desire when we engage in either. The reason for this is that sin never satisfies for long. But doing what is right is not vain. Righteous quietness and right work go together and are meant to always be seen together in the life of a Christian. You and I must learn to distinguish between right and wrong, and good and evil. This is a lesson that many people in our society have not learned. It is also possible, that it is a lesson that many Christians have not learned either; to distinguish between righteous and unrighteous work. And so it will be very profitable for us to learn it. If we do learn it, it will go a long ways towards our learning what it means to glorify God in the way that we live our life. It will also go a long ways towards eliminating many sinful habits that we may have cultivated in the past by believing that either idleness or overwork are desirable things to pursue. So first of all I want us to look at sinful quietness and sinful work. And then secondly I want us to look at righteous quietness and righteous work. I pray that each of us will be able to discern the difference by the end of our study.

1st of all - Let us consider what is described for us here in these verses as sinful quietness and sinful work.

Sinful quietness is that quietness which comes by being lazy and slothful. It comes because a person has chosen to be idle; to sit still and do nothing. The person thinks that it is possible to ignore all the responsibilities that God and men have given to him. God expects a man to work. He instituted work for man before the fall in the Garden of Eden. He set the example Himself by working six days in the creation and then resting on the 7th day. But the sinful man will do as little of it as he can on any given day. He is described for us, in this way, in verse 5: “The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh.” The last time that we studied this Chapter together we looked at verse 4 and we saw how, for a doing a right work; doing it skillfully, that a man is envied by his neighbor. We saw how dangerous this sin of envy is, and how it leads to the further sins of malice and even to murder. I said to you then; that the person who does not want this kind of trouble from people around him might be tempted to compromise doing the job right, or skillfully, or diligently; just a little bit, in order that he will not be envied. Certainly this does not glorify God.

And, a person might be tempted, even further, to seek for quietness and personal peace by not working much at all. The less work, the fool thinks, the less trouble that will come to him. The less work that he does, the better off he will be, he thinks. He says to himself: I like to sleep and rest, and work is such a burdensome thing to me; I will just be idle. But this is a very unwise and unrighteous strategy in relation to God and the meaning of life. And it has dreadful consequences. The first consequence that we will look at is poverty. Turn with me to Proverbs 24: 30. “I went by the field of the lazy man (the sluggard), and by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding; and there it was, all overgrown with thorns; its surface was covered with nettles; its stone wall was broken down.” “When I saw it, I considered it well; I looked on it and received instruction: A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest; so shall your poverty come like a prowler, and your need like an armed man.” It does not take much idleness for a person to be poor. Idleness is pictured by a person sleeping; folding their hands to rest. A little of this and your poverty shall come upon you like an armed man. The

armed man here is a robber who will take away from you all that you now, for the moment, comfortably possess.

“The fool folds his hands and consumes his flesh.” That is; as Matthew Henry says, “He eats his own flesh, is a cannibal to himself, brings himself into such a poor condition that he has nothing to eat but his own flesh; into such a desperate condition that he is ready to eat his own flesh for vexation.” “He has a dog’s life – hunger and ease.” “Idleness is a sin which has its own punishment.” (end of quote) To confirm this listen to Proverbs 19: 15. “Laziness casts one into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger.” One of the main reasons that we work is so that we will be able to eat, and to feed our family. The Apostle Paul says in 1st Timothy, “If a man will not work, neither shall he eat.” He calls it “walking disorderly” in 2nd Thessalonians 3: 6. If a person is lazy, their property will suffer, and it will not be maintained. Listen to Ecclesiastes 10, verse 18. “Because of laziness the building decays, and through idleness of hands the house leaks.” In Proverbs 24: 30 we just read that the vineyard was covered with thorns and its stone wall was broken down. Laziness brought it to that place. Listen to Proverbs 18: 9. “He who is slothful in his work is a brother to him who is a great destroyer.”

And finally, if a person is lazy, they may actually lose their soul. Look over at Matthew 25: 24 with me. You will remember the parable I trust. It is the kingdom of heaven being compared to a man traveling to a far country; the man represents Christ. And He calls His servants and delivers His goods to them. To one He gave 5 talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately He went on a long journey. “After a long time he came back to those servants and settled accounts with them.” The ones who had received 5 and 2 had gone out and traded with the talents that they had been given and they made just as many more. They were commended by the Lord by His telling them that they had done well, and since they had been faithful in a few things, He would make them ruler over many things. They entered in to the joy of their Lord.

But it says in verse 24: “Then he who had received the one talent came and said, ‘Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed.’ “And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground.” “Look, there you have what is yours.” “But his Lord answered and said, ‘You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed.’ “So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest.” “Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents.” “For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.” “And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness.” “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” We see here that laziness, in never using what God has given in order to glorify Him, and win others to Him, is an offense which deserves an eternal punishment.

But we should also understand that there is a sinful kind of overworking which is being spoken of here in our text. Verse 6 says, “Better a handful with quietness than both hands full, together with toil and grasping for the wind.” It is when you believe that you have to work continuously in order to get what you want out of life, and you cannot rest and be quiet. It is when you never have any time for Bible reading and times of secret prayer. It is when you are always too busy for either. We need to see that God has set boundaries for work, and you and I should obey them. Listen to Exodus 20, verse 8. “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 male servant, nor your female servant, 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.”

Now, you and I need to understand that the Lord could have created the whole world and everything in it in a moment, without taking 6 literal days to do so. But the reason that he took 6 literal days was so that he would give us, who were created in His image and likeness, an example of how we ought to live. Six days of work in which we labor and toil at a job, and one day in the seven; Saturday under the Old Covenant, and Sunday under the New Covenant to show the fulfillment of the Ceremonial and the Moral Law by Christ, who is the author of the New Creation, the New Birth. Overworking is when we do not hallow the Lord's Day, the Christian Sabbath, but rather intrude the work that we do the other six days, upon the rest which the Sabbath is intended to bring to ourselves, our families, our servants, and even the strangers in our gates. Let us ask whether we do this? Are we remembering the Sabbath, or are we letting our regular six day work intrude upon the sanctity of this day?

The Lord did give exceptions for work; works of mercy and necessity; things which involve help to people in physical need; hospital work, and those jobs which are necessary to the continuance of life. But how many times people will rationalize their own labors on the Lord's Day when it is not a work either of mercy or necessity. They are sinning against the Lord, for this commandment is not ceremonial but moral in nature. It is placed within the 10 commandments which were given by God to all men, not just to the Jews. Under the New Covenant, all the ceremonial features of the Law have been fulfilled by Christ and set aside, so that we do not have a strict and rigid Sabbath as the Jews under the Old Covenant did. Our Sabbath is not given to bind us up, but in order to cultivate holiness to the Lord both personally and in the Church, in attendance upon the services of worship. Let us consider whether we are observing this day and hallowing it?

But 2nd – I want us to look at righteous quietness and righteous work.

Verse 6 says, "Better a handful with quietness than both hands full, together with toil and grasping for the wind." As we have seen, there is a sinful quietness which is "folding one's hands" and being lazy and idle. And then there is also a sinful work, not keeping our 6 day work within the bounds commanded by the Lord. But how do we cultivate a righteous quietness and perform right works? Here in verse 6 we see that it is possible to do both. "Better a handful of quietness...." This, even a handful, comes about by the grace of Jesus Christ. Listen to Isaiah 30, verse 15. "For thus says the Lord God, the Holy one of Israel: 'In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength.'" In the NAS it says, "In repentance and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and trust is your strength." It is by the graces which are found in the Lord Jesus Christ that we are able to quietly rest in all that He has done for us at the cross in taking away our sins, and return to Him time and time again for the grace that we will need to repent, where we need to; and to reform our life and bring it into line with His good and perfect will for us.

Sometimes we think that our poverty, either our financial poverty or our spiritual poverty will keep us from being able to do God's will. But – "Blessed are the poor, and blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "Better is a handful with quietness, than both hands full, together with toil...." Listen to Proverbs 15, verse 16 – "Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure with trouble." "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fatted calf with hatred." You can see here that it is not in having wealth and material possessions that we find righteous quietness and righteous work for the Lord. It is found in fearing the Lord. It is found in keeping His commandments by the grace of the Lord Jesus. Even if you only have a little, even if you only have a dinner of herbs with the love of Christ and the love of the brethren; it is enough. It is enough to satisfy and it is enough to give us righteous confidence in doing what is right. Listen to 1st Thessalonians Chapter 4, verse 9 – "But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia." "But we urge you brethren, that you increase more and more; that you also aspire

to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.”

So here you can see the culmination of all of our study this afternoon. A person who would work to the glory of God cannot fold their hands. They cannot be lazy; they cannot be unloving toward the brethren. Instead you will always be abounding in the work of the Lord, and abounding in right work in relation to God and man. It will be your aspiration to lead a quiet life; not a life where everyone is impressed by you, but where they come to be impressed by the God who has given you such great grace that you have come to recognize the value of quietness. Your greatest goal in earthly terms will be to work hard, doing all that you do to the glory of God, and to do the things that you do with quietness and confidence in your heart. You have come to know that that God’s promises and Christ’s grace are enough for you. You don’t want to be great in men’s eyes. You don’t want to be grasping after the wind. You want Christ and His glory to be seen. You want to be useful to Him as a servant. You are perfectly willing to mind your own business and to try to be faithful to do all that He has commanded you, and yet you are very concerned to be a help to others. You are looking forward to the time when you shall see your Lord Jesus face to face. You are hoping to hear these words when you first see Him: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” “Enter into the joy of your Lord.”