

The Christian and Diligence – Proverbs 6:6-11

INTRODUCTION

Laziness is a sin in the sight of God. The Bible says that if a man does not work, let him not eat. **2 Thessalonians 3:10** (KJV) “For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.” Every genuine believer has to work hard to be a good testimony of the grace and mercy of God in his life. He cannot afford to bring shame to the Name of Christ by his laziness. The Bible describes this person as a sluggard. A sluggard is a slothful person. He is extremely lazy. Diligence is his enemy.

Diligence is hard work. Sinful man is lazy and loves to take it easy. He will try to work as little as possible for maximum reward. This characterizes the sinful nature. That is why the LORD cursed the ground with thorns and thistles after the Fall of man. This was to keep man busy, working in the fields so that he would have less time to sin. Despite this, sinful man sinned against God and soon God had to wipe all mankind off the face of the earth with a global flood to start the world afresh with four men and their wives. God said that though He cleansed the world of all her filth with water, the heart of man was still evil from his youth (Genesis 8:21). This has been carried through into our modern day society. The heart of sinful man is wicked and deceitful, who can know it?

In contrast, the believer loves to work because he serves the LORD. He is motivated by the love of Jesus Christ which was given by God when he became a Christian (Romans 5:5). This new motivation sustains him from morning to night, and is more than sufficient to keep him faithful and hardworking for the rest of his life. He sees his earthly sojourn as a pilgrimage. He has been entrusted to serve His LORD with every breath till the day He calls him home to glory. Diligence should be part of the new nature that God has given to him. He does not shy away from toiling in different circumstances and environments. The reason is that his God is sovereign. Wherever he serves and his areas of service are known by God who has seen fit to place His servant there for His glory and divine purpose. The believer serves cheerfully without murmuring and complaining.

The book of Proverbs gives us many warnings on what the nature and consequences of a sluggard are. Let us pray that we are not and will not become sluggards but that we will be godly and obedient servants of the Most High God.

I. REBUKE THE SLUGGARD (6:6-11; see also Proverbs 26:14)

The sluggard is commanded to go to the ant and learn from it. The ant is an insignificant creature. It is small and often trampled upon by human beings as they traverse long distances in a very organized fashion. There is no leader to order them around. However, they know where to go and how to do it most efficiently. The way they cooperate with one another in carrying a heavy load is astounding. They just get their work done and do not waste any time or procrastinate. Matthew Poole made these astute observations in his commentary: “her actions and manner of living, especially her diligence and providence, which are the things commended in her, of which naturalists give many instances, as that the ants watch the fittest seasons for all things, that they provide most plentifully against the time of famine, that they never hinder, but always assist one another in their work, and unite their force together to carry away such things as are too large or heavy for one of them; that they prepare fit cells or repositories for their corn in the ground, and such as the rain cannot easily reach; and if through excessive rain their corn be wet, they bring it forth to be dried; that they bite off the ends of the grains of corn that they may not grow, &c.” The terrain will not deter them one bit. They cross pools of water, climb over trees and rocks, and any obstacle that stands in their way is determinedly overcome. When they arrive at their

destinations, they help one another to store their hard-earned food well to keep them dry or from other predators. They build cells underground or inside nooks and crannies of trees to ensure that they are well stored for the wet and cold seasons of the year during which they know they would be hard pressed to find food. Their instincts tell them to work hard while it is still day. They know when they have to work and that the time will come when even if they want to gather food there will be no food to gather. They are aware that they can gather only during the summer when the weather is conducive to travel outside and they will not be killed by the elements. They work during the harvest when the food is plentiful; they know that all the food will be lost when winter comes. They know their capabilities and the speed it takes to gather their food to complete their storage plans. They carry it out year after year like clockwork!

The believer is commanded by God to observe, i.e. scrutinize or inspect, carefully what these tiny creatures are doing. They know they will die without proper and careful preparation for hard times. They work hard and very diligently to ensure that their future needs are well taken care of in light of what they know will surely come to pass. This is wisdom. It is the right application of knowledge. The ants neither have nor need a guide, overseer or a ruler to motivate them. They know what they need to do and they just do it, each and every one of them in a very cooperative manner.

Using synonymous parallelism in verse 9, God wants to shake the sluggard out of his stupor. The first “sleep” in verse 9a refers to one who is lying down but not asleep yet. The second “sleep” in verse 9b means to sleep like a person who is “out cold”! It describes a person who is inactive and does nothing. He is as good as being dead to his world. He is lazy and when he is supposed to be awake and out working, he sleeps on. He refuses to get out of his reclined position. Verses 10 and 11 are to be understood as one. Verse 10 is a synonymous parallel to emphasize the wasting of precious time. However, verses 10 and verse 11 are in a synthetic parallelism relationship whereby verse 11 adds to the thought mentioned in verse 10. Verse 10 rebukes the sluggard that he has been slothful long enough. When will he get off his couch and do something with his life? There are two illustrations in verse 11. The first declares that if he does not do so soon, poverty will visit him. His poverty will come to him, i.e. enter his life like a man who went overseas and returns home unexpectedly. In other words, this first illustration emphasizes the suddenness of poverty. Before he realizes it, all his wealth is gone and he is bankrupt. The second illustration in verse 11 speaks of a man in want. The word for “want” refers to one who is impoverished. He is like an armed man who is desperate and desires to hurt others to satisfy his want. He will do crazy things including unlawful acts because of the state of want that he is in. His desperation is emphasized.

A sluggard wastes his life away and finds himself suddenly in a state of great desperation.

II. AVOID THE SLUGGARD (10:26)

Trusting a sluggard to go on an errand is like tasting vinegar and having smoke in the eyes. This is obviously an emblematic parallelism. The first emblem emphasizes the extreme sourness that stings the teeth when in contact with vinegar. Vinegar attacks the alkali of the bone rendering it weak and unable to masticate. Such a feeling is to be avoided at all costs. One would wash his mouth immediately to get rid of this terribly annoying taste before any more damage is done. The teeth were extremely precious to the people in those days as they did not have dentists to care for and mend their damaged teeth. Smoke in the eyes will smart and cause the eyes to water. The feeling is most unbearable and sight may be drastically hampered. Frustration and vexation of spirit follow when both of these precious senses are incapacitated.

Sending a sluggard on an errand brings pain, frustration and vexation of spirit. He loiters his way without any sense of responsibility or urgency to complete his errand on time. He cannot be trusted. He is useless to the ones who have to trust him and need him. It does not matter if he is talented or smart and has the ability to do it. The fact of the matter is that his laziness makes him neither trustworthy nor dependable. He is unfaithful. Like the immediate removal of vinegar from the mouth and smoke from the eyes, the sluggard is removed without delay. What a wasted life! His slothfulness destroyed him.

III. EXCUSES OF THE SLUGGARD (15:19; 19:24; 21:25; 22:13; 26:13-16)

These excuses of the sluggard are lame, conjured to not be diligent or work. His excuses include the following:-

a. **Difficult paths – Proverbs 15:19** (KJV) “The way of the slothful *man* is as an hedge of thorns; but the way of the righteous is made plain.” What we have here is an antithetical parallelism. A hedge of thorns is impenetrable. If one tries to fight his way through, he would be pierced by the thorns. To the sluggard, any path he takes to perform a task is like a hedge of thorns. This invisible hedge of thorns stands in his way and he stop in his tracks and will not move an inch. If he is in a committee, the sluggard will devise ways to hinder the work rather than overcome a problem. He is a killer of diligence and labour. His life is a life of cutting corners and devising ways on how not to get anything done.

To the righteous, there are no obstacles too difficult to overcome. He sees beyond the obstacles. He focuses on his goal and is not discouraged or fazed by the difficult people or circumstances preventing him from completing his task. He sees the path toward his goal as a flat highway void of all obstacles, unlike the sluggard who sees it as an impenetrable hedge of thorns. The contrast is in the two opposing perspectives from two different hearts and minds.

b. **No hands – Proverbs 19:24** (KJV) “A slothful *man* hideth his hand in *his* bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again.” (see also Proverbs 26:15) The sluggard hides, i.e. conceals or bury his hand in his bosom. It is as if he has no hand. This is a deliberate act. The Bible says that he refuses to bring his hand to his mouth again. To bring food to the mouth with the hand is a reflex action on our part. We do not think about such an act. It is as natural as breathing. We do it all the time when we drink or eat. However, the sluggard refuses to do so. The epitome of his laziness is that he would rather starve to death than to pick up his food with his hand, put it into his mouth and eat! He pretends to be helpless or rather hand-less!

Applied to the spiritual realm, the sluggard may talk a lot, but as long as he does not lift his hand to do anything, he is burying his hand in his bosom where all can see his laziness.

c. **Lame excuses – Proverbs 22:13** (KJV) “The slothful *man* saith, *There is* a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets.” (see also Proverbs 26:13) Lions are found in forests or jungles. The sluggard makes lames excuses like there is a lion in the streets just so he does not have to leave the house to go to work! It is not a common thing to find a lion in the streets. Furthermore, to say that he will be killed is to add foolishness upon foolishness.

The fear for his life adds cowardice to the sluggard’s repertoire of exaggerated lame excuses!

d. **Un-teachable – Proverbs 26:16** (KJV) “The sluggard *is* wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.” Being a sluggard is one thing, but if he is teachable and repentant, then his slothfulness is a temporary condition. However, when the sluggard is wise in his own conceit, i.e. in his own eyes, he will remain in his slothfulness and will die in it. He

thinks he is right all the time. He cannot work with anyone. He gets nothing done and yet he thinks he is wiser than seven men who can render a reason. The number "seven" is understood as the number of completeness. This means that the complete reasoning of truly wise men is ignored by the sluggard. His self righteous and inflated opinion of himself makes him immune to all the counsel to help him out of his slothfulness. He will perish in his own pride.

Applied to the spiritual realm, an un-teachable, lazy, professing believer will die in his own conceit. He will die spiritually. This is worse than dying physically. He thinks he is saved but in reality he is not. He is lazy and does not care much for wise counsel. He insists he is right all the time even when the evidence before him shows that he is obviously wrong. The Word of God is denied and ignored by this spiritual sluggard.

IV. LIFE OF THE SLUGGARD (13:4; 20:4; 24:30-34) – There are consequences for everything that we do or fail to do. In the case of the sluggard, he cannot expect his non-action to have zero consequences. The following are some passages from Proverbs that emphasize the consequences of a sluggard's life.

a. Has Nothing – Proverbs 13:4 (KJV) "The soul of the sluggard desireth, and *hath* nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat." The strong desire or longings of the sluggard will not make him rich or put food on the table. There is nothing wrong with having a strong desire. But if the desire is not translated into action, it is useless. The sluggard might even boast of his desires and great plans to succeed and to make millions. He can talk about living in a big mansion, and dining in fanciful restaurants but if he does not work, his desires will not feed or clothe him. A parallel passage that reiterates this verse is **Proverbs 24:30-34** (KJV) "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; **31** And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, *and* nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. **32** Then I saw, *and* considered *it* well: I looked upon *it*, *and* received instruction. **33** Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: **34** So shall thy poverty come *as* one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man." The slothful might even have land as described here but if he allows the thorns and nettles to grow and destroy his land, he has nothing. The sluggard who has talents and does not use them because of his laziness will also have nothing.

However, the soul of the diligent or the determined one shall be made fat, i.e. satisfied. The antithetical parallelism drives home the importance of the outcome of a sluggard and the diligent soul. The former has nothing whereas the latter is fully satisfied.

When this is applied to the spiritual realm, the sluggard is a professing Christian who has big ideas and strong aspirations. He might even make many promises and yearly consecrations to God but everything is just a desire. Nothing is ever translated into a life of diligence and disciplined labour. This can also be true of those who profess to be believers! There is the desire to pray and attend church and FEBC and study the Bible but there is still a bankruptcy in the soul that has not been filled by the Bread of Life and Living Water. They are still spiritually hungry and thirsty!

b. Kills Himself – Proverbs 21:25 (KJV) "The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour." This is a very cryptic and vivid way of portraying a sluggard. He has a very strong desire or longing for anything under the sun including food, drink, life partner, family life and job. However, as long as the longings remain as longings, he will be killed by his own longings. His hands refuse to labour, i.e. to do anything. It is an abject utter refusal. He is very

firm in his refusal not to work even though he is not a cripple and he is not handicapped in any way. There are many people in this world who have very good longings but they do not take even a short step toward fulfilling their desires. The companion verse says it all in contrasting the sluggard and the righteous: **Proverbs 21:26 (KJV)** “He coveteth greedily all the day long: but the righteous giveth and spareth not.” The phrase “coveteth greedily” literally means “he himself desires desire”. The emphasis in this first line is the duration of his desires which is “all day long.” His life is full of desires only without one tiny bit of action. However, the righteous works hard and gives of his substance and life and spares not. He sacrifices his life, time and substance to help and be a blessing to others.

Applied to the spiritual realm, a man’s desire to be spiritual and holy means little to God. This kind of desire kills him. He does not take one step to pray, to study the Bible, or to come to church but he has a strong desire to be holy! Such folly of the sluggard will soon end his life of vanity.

- c. **Shall Beg – Proverbs 20:4 (KJV)** “The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; *therefore* shall he beg in harvest, and *have* nothing.” Farming is a profession where timing is everything. To procrastinate means to go hungry tomorrow. The reason is that there are many constraints in the farmer’s life. Some of these limitations are within his control and others are not. Whatever the farmer plants requires a certain fixed amount of time to grow. In Palestine, the former and latter rain will fall at certain times of the year and if the farmer is not ready or is lazy and misses the deadline, his crops will suffer and even die. The precise timing from tilling the ground, planting the seeds, watering the ground to harvesting the crops is not negotiable. This must be done by the farmer year in and year out. He works hard this year to provide for next year.

The only time to plough is during autumn. This means that the cold season would be drifting in. The sluggard uses this as an excuse not to plough. The emphatic denial or refusal is emphasized here. He knows that this is the **ONLY** time to plough the ground for planting in order that he might harvest during harvest time. The rest of the farmer’s labour begins here. If there is no beginning, then there will be nothing at the end! Not to begin ploughing means there’s no need to work for the rest of the year! The only means available to him when harvest time comes is to beg from those who worked diligently. If he is too ashamed to beg, then he starves!

When applied to the spiritual realm, it is even more significant. The one and only time to be ready in the harvest field of the LORD is to be prepared. Preparation must begin the moment we are saved. The LORD has prepared for us a future where all of God’s children may reap what they sow today. The early years of growing in the LORD are crucial years. These years occur once only. How many have regretted not studying more of God’s Word when they had the strength and energy of a youth? Now that they have the time as elderlies, they do not have the energy or the mental capacity to study God’s Word. They have regrets upon regrets to comfort them in their evening years. Their cry is a constant “if only”. But this is as bad as crying over spilt milk. Let us all put in the hard work now in the study of God’s Word and we will reap the fruits of our labour in years to come. The fruits of our labour definitely include a life of holiness and righteous living and our children becoming God fearing believers.

CONCLUSION

Every Christian has been given the love of Christ as his greatest and best motivation for diligence. Therefore, for the sluggard to be lazy and not do anything spiritually fruitful with his life is not only shameful but also very spiritually precarious. The Parable of the Talents given by the LORD Jesus Christ in Matthew 25:14-30 is a very stark warning to all professing believers. The believer who truly accepts Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour would not want to be a sluggard in all things, especially in things spiritual. His testimony for Christ is at stake. He does not desire to bring shame to the Name of Christ after all that Christ has done for him on the cross of Calvary! His love for Christ which wells up from within his regenerated soul would not allow it! He takes heed of the rebuke and warnings and repents of his ways of slothfulness and comes back to the way of diligence. He realizes that there are no excuses that can stand up against the search light of God's Truth which pierces into the hearts and souls of all men.

He accepts and agrees that slothfulness will reap certain terrible results that would ruin his life and ultimately destroy him. It is not possible for one who is truly born again and has been given the love of God and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to knowingly and deliberately live the life of a sluggard. AMEN.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the definition of a diligent student, housewife, or employee? Is he or she a person who works/studies without play? How do you rate recreation time in your definition of diligence?
2. What are some of the more common excuses given by students, housewives and employees for not working hard? Are you motivated by Christ in all that you do? Give reasons for your answers.
3. What are some of the popular motivations adopted by the world to motivate students, employees and housewives to work hard? How do these motivations measure up to the motivation of "the love of Christ"?
4. What do you think your pastor should be doing which constitutes as diligence? Do you think that pastors should be bound by the 9 to 5 work schedule? Do you think that pastors should be given a day off every week?
5. What is the secret for maintaining a healthy and diligent way of life and to preventing slothfulness?