

Slothfulness and Idleness of Sloth

Proverbs 19:15

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“Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger.” - Proverbs 19:15 (6:9–11; 10:4).

“Slothfulness” or idleness is a well-used word or concept in the OT and especially in Solomon’s writings. It can speak of anything from laziness to unusually slow or non-energetic movement, to the refusal or failure to use the needed or called for energy in getting a job done. Depending on the context used, it adds the concept of an “enjoyment” of the failure to be diligent in a task, hence the idea of laziness as one would “rather” be still and easy than hard working.

There is actually a LOT of discussion about this idea throughout the Bible, virtually ALL of it in a negative sense:

I. Sloth is a Forbidden Quality or Indulgence

First of all, it is both clear and obvious that Slothfulness is a forbidden quality or indulgence for those who have any desire to be all that God intends for them to be.

Rom 12:11 not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;

Heb 6:12 that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

A. Sloth Can/Does produce Apathy

One of the biggest reasons for this is that it is clear that is the Bible says that sloth produce apathy. “Apathy” is akin to sloth in that it the lack of caring sufficiently so as to produce any diligence in the pursuit of a task.

Prov 12:27 The lazy man does not roast what he took in hunting, But diligence is man’s precious possession.

Prov 26:15 The lazy man buries his hand in the bowl; It wearies him to bring it back to his mouth.

These both show us the point here, the “lazy” or slothful many couldn’t be bothered with the most basic of tasks to realize the benefit doing.

B. Sloth Is Akin to Apathy

The Bible also tells us that Sloth is akin to the idea of extravagance. The extravagant one uses and wastes his/her resources on unnecessary things that are simply to please his/her flesh. If one is too lazy or slothful to show the diligence and effort to see to it that there is enough provision rolling in;

Prov 18:9 He who is slothful in his work Is a brother to him who is a great destroyer.

C. Sloth Can Be A Destroyer

We might also say, in a manner somewhat akin to the above, sloth can (and will) actually destroy the actually means and ability of the manner in which God provides for us. This is not to say that God “can’t” provide despite our sloth; He can and even surely does because of His goodness and mercy. But it is to say that the failure and disobedience of His people can have a tremendous impact on the way, and even the degree we experience that provision.

D. Sloth Is Often Accompanied By Conceit

Solomon also tells us that sloth is often accompanied by conceit.

Prov 26:16 The lazy man is wiser in his own eyes Than seven men who can answer sensibly.

It seems sure that it is obvious to men that being slothful is very negative and destructive way to live, even temporarily. One implication by the deliberate indulgence in sloth is that the indulgent one thinks more of his own evaluation than any other opinion/advice. That kind of arrogance is foolish and ridiculous!

II. Sloth Also Leads To Quite A Number Of Related Or Resultant Matters

The Bible also tells us that sloth also leads to quite a number of related or resultant matters:

1. *First, related to what we have ready discussed, it frequently has poverty as its’ logical result.*

Prov 10:4 He who has a slack hand becomes poor, But the hand of the diligent makes rich.

Prov 20:13 Do not love sleep, lest you come to poverty; Open your eyes, and you will be satisfied with bread.

Note that both of these set slackness over against real and tangible gain. This is NOT to say that one guarantees the other. There are many who have worked hard for long times, even for all their lives and yet, are still not what anyone would call rich. The point is actually that anyone seeking riches need to make hard work a part of their strategy. some riches come by other means, but the general way is via their own hard work.

2. *Secondly, we're told in the Scriptures that another result of sloth is not just poverty, but also the degradation and minimizing of personal dignity*

We have also spoken about this in this post, but it is worth saying again. Sloth does not just result in the theoretical experience of poverty, but in the actual and very personal experience of want and hunger. Likewise, it also often results in an appeal and request for help that can be degrading and soul hurting.

Prov 20:4 The lazy man will not plow because of winter; He will beg during harvest and have nothing.

Prov 24:34 So shall your poverty come like a prowler, And your need like an armed man.

When you think about it, this is actually a quite logical conclusion to reach. It is not so much that God inflicts this result on the slothful, but rather that it is the result, as well as the personal experience of it that follows sloth. Poverty is NOT just a theory or concept; rather it is a real and very negative EXPERIENCE that has a profound impact in a person's life. And so...

3. *Sloth Also Can Result in Personal Experience of Want and Even Hunger*

As another extended result of sloth, we see the personal are specific result of hunger. One of the ideas here is that of hunger with the implication that this is not hunger that affects an individual, but his entire family. Though this is the case now, the husband/male in the family, in Solomon's day, was responsible to provide for his entire family. Again, not so much today, but we must read the Scripture in the context of the time it was written, and not reimagine it as if its' main point rests in our own time. We must not reinterpret Solomon as if he had today in view. surely, God had multiple time eras in view, but the Scripture MUST be understood as a fruit of the time it was written and THEN applied (by means of the guidance of God's Spirit) to the day in which we live. Feeding the family was the responsibility of the Husband/Father and for him to be slothful would, quite naturally and logically result in an inability to feed his family (among other things).

Prov 19:15 Laziness casts one into a deep sleep, And an idle person will suffer hunger.

Prov 20:13 Do not love sleep, lest you come to poverty; Open your eyes, and you will be satisfied with bread.

In the reference to Prov. 19:15, it's interesting how Solomon uses a powerful analogy here in comparing the result of sloth with the effect of a deep sleep. We should the coordinating conjunction that he uses to join the two images. The implication is that just as the lazy person is always too tired to work; his laziness becomes more and more severe until he is in dire poverty.

The 20:13 sees it as much the same idea, speaking of sloth as a “love” of sleep. Of course there are many other things either demonstrated by or leading to sloth. It directly calls on the slothful one, the much sleeper to “open your eyes” and the terrible effect of sloth will be foregone.

4. *A fourth result of sloth is one that is almost entirely a figure given to make us think - sloth leads to Bondage,*

Now, this is not necessarily physical bondage, though the falling into poverty could result in some sorts of physical bondage. Rather I suspect that Solomon is saying here that the normal freedom in life, to enjoy life and family, can be forfeit if we are not in zealous pursuit of what is needful to secure that which can provide for us.

Prov 12:24 The hand of the diligent will rule, But the lazy man will be put to forced labor.

What Solomon is doing here is using extremes to underscore his truth and let us think through the reality of his point. IF one is diligent then there can/will be great benefit reaped. If he is not, if he is slothful (lazy) then, in order to make ends meet and accomplish his goals and gain the necessities of life, he will be in virtual bondage! Of course we are not saying that hard work will elevate one to high government position or even allow him to make the rules. Rather, his point is how very necessary diligence and effective effort can accomplish necessities versus how sloth and laziness can undermine that very thing.

The rulership here is not any kind of political or governmental rulership but rather the have “rulership” (remember the non-literal sense of this statement) over the needs and matters of life. Like wise the “forced labor” is not slavery or a prison work gang. They are extremes used to make his point effectively.

5. *A fifth result of Sloth can be that of what we could call “Disappointment”.*

Prov 13:4 The soul of a lazy man desires, and has nothing; But the soul of the diligent shall be made rich.

Prov 21:25 The desire of the lazy man kills him, For his hands refuse to labor.

It seems clear that in both of these Solomon’s point is that the normal and natural desires of man, for success in life and family. Though the lazy desires such things, because he is slothful, he “has” because of his failure to put in the work needful to secure it. In 13:4 he puts it over against the “diligence that reaps good result. This is not to say (consistent with what we have mentioned before) that anyone who works hard will soon be flush with riches. Rather it is saying that it is right to work hard and that those who do with see good and proper result as the result.

Note also that Solomon is, again, eloquent in his description in exactly what he is saying there at the end of 21:25. It is not he misfortune that works against the lazy one. Rather, it is the nature, the essence of just what sloth is (or isn't!) that does so.

6. *Yet another result of slothfulness is what we could call “Ruin”.*

Prov 24:30–31 I went by the field of the lazy man, And by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding; 31 And there it was, all overgrown with thorns; Its surface was covered with nettles; Its stone wall was broken down.

Eccl 10:18 Because of laziness the building decays, And through idleness of hands the house leaks.

As he often does, Solomon speaks of this part of his message in the first person. He speaks as if he was seeing the matters in 24:30-31 as they were before his eyes. What he was seeing was showing the natural and definite result of a lack of work and care.

The following Ecclesiastes verse carries the thought further in the same direction. It is as if he is make a little poem for us to carry the thought he wants us to grasp. The very negative results are entirely the fault of the failure to do what was necessary with the point that it went undone because of laziness. It speaks to the unavoidable effect of sloth/laziness - it ALWAYS has a negative and destructive result and effect.

Note that we are NOT talking about normal, regular sleep that is a part of our everyday life. Nor are we speaking about the “time off” kind of thing that all people do from time to time to unwind and relax. No, we are speaking of the over and above kind of sleep/laziness that some can and do indulge in.

7. *Sloth Can Result in Tattling and Meddling*

The Apostle Paul, in the Book of 1 Timothy suggests a 7th result He suggests to us, what we'll call “Tattling and meddling”.

1 Tim 5:13 And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not.

Note that Paul introduces this verse with “besides” giving the sense of “in addition to” all that he has already said about those in view. The things that he adds are not, by any means, complimentary or to be desired. They picture the woman (though what he says in the actions mentioned is NOT limited to just women) who is given to the classic view of the busybody who takes delight in wandering and spreading whatever the gossip du-jour is. We simply note that the idea of idleness, of sloth as we have been discussing, as a foundation or even energizing, enabling aspect to the vices he will go on and list. The negatives he goes on and lists are such that no one would hold up a hand and say “wait a

moment - that's OK!" They are recognized failings and Paul wants us to understand that they, among other things, arise from sloth, failure to work hard and diligently.

8. *Interestingly, the Effects of Sloth can afford instruction to others.*

Prov 24:30–32 I went by the field of the lazy man, And by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding; 31 And there it was, all overgrown with thorns; Its surface was covered with nettles; Its stone wall was broken down. 32 When I saw it, I considered it well; I looked on it and received instruction:

For anyone who reads and studies the Bible, seeking to learn from the Spirit what God has to say about the matters of life and living, the ways and results of one who is given to sloth can be great teaching mechanism for what ought to be the manner in which we conduct our ways; as well as for what manners and paths we ought be sure that do NOT tread. This not saying that this is a manner in which we should seek to used, but it IS a example that we can and should take from those around us.

III. *There is a Clear Biblical Remonstrance Against Sloth*

Prov 6:6 Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise,
Prov 6:9 How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep?

Solomon actually has a good bit to say against laziness. The best known of his statements are found above. The image is a common one, one we've already seen. The ant and the one who sleeps to an undue amount give a powerful illustration for us to consider, as we have done already. The ant is one that keeps moving and doing, and accomplishes far beyond its' apparent abilities.

Psalm 6:9 simply paints a picture of one who sleeps constantly, and other passages add the effects of sleeping instead doing all that one needs to do.

The two verses are clearly written and leave little room to misinterpret the intention of Solomon in putting them to paper. They seem to be virtual commands that ought to be followed and implemented in life.

There are, as is typical of man (not just males!), many excuses offered for laziness and failing to work as diligently as they ought. Many of them, as we take a brief look, are simply ridiculous, but if we think it over, we can almost HEAR someone around us making the very excuse in view for less than diligent and energetic effort in their working efforts.

IV. False excuses for.

Prov 20:4 The lazy man will not plow because of winter; He will beg during harvest and have nothing.

Prov 22:13 The lazy man says, "There is a lion outside! I shall be slain in the streets!"

These are two obviously lame excuses, yet we see and/or hear them again and again. The circumstance surrounding the actual work can, for some, make a very useful and easy excuse for sloth. The two we have shown are meant to be simple examples. Solomon implies that there are as many false excuses, pretty much as there are tasks to apply ones' self to. We must be careful not to give vent to any and to be sure that none creep in unseen.

There are a number of illustrations of sloth in the Bible that both show the issue as well as the results.

V. Sloth Shown in the Bible

A. Illustrated.

Prov 26:14 As a door turns on its hinges, So does the lazy man on his bed.

Matt 25:18 But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money.

Matt 25:26 "But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed.

The writers of the Bible are very eloquent in their putting forth of this matter (as well as of many, many others). Likewise, there a number of examples of sloth given in both the OT and the NT:

B. Examples of Sloth:

1. The OT Example of the Watchmen.

Is 56:10 His watchmen are blind, They are all ignorant; They are all dumb dogs, They cannot bark; Sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber.

Speaking of Israel's irresponsible leaders, Isaiah refers to those who were responsible to "watch" for danger coming to afflict the city. Instead of doing as they were responsible to do, they, among other things, slept as their posts! Clearly, this is meant by Isaiah as a terrible negative and to speak, not just of the leaders, but really of the entire nation! It is interesting that Isaiah says that they not only slept, but they did so in the most comfortable position (lying down), and they "loved" to do so!

2. *The NT Example of The Athenians.*

Over in the Book of Acts, Luke makes mention of the Athenians. Speaking to the Aeropagus and the gathered Philosophers, Paul mentions that many of these philosophers were interested in little more than the dull, intellectual sleepiness and sloth that the wise are often given over to.

Acts 17:21 For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.

3. *The NT Example of The Thessalonians.*

Paul, in the Book of 2 Thessalonians mentions that some of the Thessalonians had given themselves over to some of the results of sloth that we have mentioned before - disorderly walking around, not working, and being gossips or busybodies.

2 Thess 3:11 For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.

And so the Bible is clear that the vice of sloth is to be cast aside and avoided at all costs.

To rehearse our interpretation, we have noted that our passage speaks of slothfulness, or the habitual avoidance of exertion, leads on to a lethargic state which becomes irresistible. The consequence of idleness, sooner or later, must needs be suffering—that kind of suffering which an ungratified appetite creates. The proverb may be applied to the physical, intellectual, or spiritual life of a man.

There are, indeed, a number of illustrations -

- “Abundance of idleness” was among the causes of that grievous infatuation which overtook the inhabitants of Sodom, as well as of their vicious habits (Ezek. 16:49).
- So sunk in a moral lethargy were they that all the warnings of “righteous Lot” fell unheeded upon their ears, and even to his own sons-in-law “he seemed as one that mocked” (2 Pet. 2:8; Gen. 19:14).
- Our Lord has illustrated this truth by parables. Many, after a life of voluptuous ease, suffer torment from an unappeased appetite.
- The rich fool, having imbruted his very soul, is snatched away from his stored-up treasures, with no provision made for the future.
- The foolish virgins wake out of their sleep to find themselves debarred the Bridegroom’s feast.
- The slothful servant is deprived even of that which he seemed to have, and condemned to gnash his teeth in disappointment at the loss of what he might have had.

- Once more - to turn from parable to fact - it is a part of the punishment of the Jews who, in a state of judicial torpor (Isa. 6:10), neglected the Word of God (both written and Incarnate), that they suffer now of long time from a famine of that Word (Amos 8:11).

Making application we can easily see that the law is peremptory and of wide application, *“that if any will not work neither should he eat* (2 Thess. 3:10). To be sleeping instead of toiling in sowing and harvest time, as we have seen, is the way to starve.

But, thoughtfully, we can rightly say that this is also true of the mind and of the spirit. Idle habits, contracted in youth and habitually indulged, produce gradually a state of intellectual torpor which is fatal to self-improvement. Then, sooner or later, the acute pain of hopeless ignorance, of gnawing necessity, is felt. Even worse is the effect of spiritual sloth upon the soul. A man may be wide awake to the claims of physical or intellectual labor. But of “the things which accompany salvation” a drowsy disregard may have led on to spiritual paralysis of the highest faculties of his nature. Then, what remains but that *“he awake”* (at the archangel’s trump, if not before), *“and his soul is empty”* (Isa. 29:8)? Then, since the soul was made for God, and nothing less will satisfy it, there must needs follow those unappeasable cravings which are compared to *“the worm that dies not.”*

Oh, may I be wise in time, and cease to dream, and awake to the realities of life, and hunger after righteousness, and work out my own salvation!
