

March 15, 2009

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS: SLOTH
2SAM 11.1-27; MATT 25.14-30; 1COR 15.50-58

1. THE CHARACTER OF SLOTH

A. SABBATH REST: THE VIRTUOUS HOST OF SLOTH

“Sabbath” has all the necessary biblical connotations of the proper relationship between rest and work.

Man is to follow God in the six days of labor, one day of rest pattern of creation. But man’s first full day is God’s Sabbath. Man begins with rest in God’s presence and then works from that rest for the next six days with the goal of entering into a fuller and greater Sabbath.

Sabbath goal cannot be appreciated without the six days of labor that lead up to it. Sabbath provides the *purpose* for our work and causes us to labor diligently. Labor makes our rest enjoyable and meaningful.

Sloth is not equal to rest or relaxation. Sloth is not warded off with busyness.

Idleness is sometimes good and necessary because it is reflective of the rest that God provides in the midst of arduous labor. And God does provide rest and relaxation in the midst of arduous labor. Cf. Pss 23; 127.

B. SLOTH: APATHY AND INDIFFERENCE

Henry Fairlie: “... the sin of Sloth is a state of dejection that gives rise to torpor [lethargy or inactivity] of mind and feeling and spirit; to a sluggishness or, as it has been put, a poisoning of the will; to despair, faintheartedness, and even desirelessness, a lack of real desire for anything, even for what is good.”

Sloth is rooted in, not so much the activity of the body, but the motivation of the will. Sloth deals with your desires or lack thereof.

Sloth does manifest in obvious lack of physical activity at times. Slothful man sometimes is the one who refuses to work in anything productive in order to provide for his own needs or for those for whom he is responsible.

2Sam 11: It was the “return of the year” (i.e., spring) when kings go out to war. David has recently completed campaign against the Ammonites (ch. 10). David sends Joab this time. Nothing wrong with that, but David does not participate at any level. The warriors of Israel were to keep themselves from women while engaged in war (cp. Uriah & 1Sam 21.4-5). David’s is laying on his couch all day and finally gets up to take a stroll around the roof of the king’s palace.

Sloth is *indifferent toward one’s responsibilities*. Sloth refuses to stir itself up to do what it is called to do. It disregards the legitimate vocations given by God and decides for itself that inactivity is the best way to approach one’s responsibilities.

Sloth is purposeless idleness. There is an idleness that can be refreshing and purposeful. But Sloth engages in meaningless inactivity. Sloth is not rest *from* something and *for the purpose* of being able to engage oneself later. It is simply idleness for idleness sake.

Proverbs and Sloth: Prov 20.4; 21.25 (and many others)

Paul and Sloth: 1Tm 5.8 (a man who refuses to provide has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever); 1Thess 4.11-12; 2Thess 3.10 (the man who refuses to work should not be able to eat).

Laziness should not be subsidized but penalized. A man’s hunger is a good motivating factor for him to repent of his slothfulness and will drive him to do what is necessary. Subsidizing laziness will only perpetuate laziness.

Less obvious Sloth: excessive busyness. By excessive busyness you may mask the pursuit of the things that matter; neglecting your responsibilities simply for banal activity. You are apathetic to that which is your responsibility.

Our culture: busy all the time, but why? Purposeless activity. It has no meaning.

Busyness may mean that you are unwilling to stop long enough to think about the things that matter. You are avoiding the work, the effort, the pain, and the perseverance that it takes to deal with the important issues.

Busyness may also mask that you are not fulfilling some of your God-given vocations. Sloth is the neglect of those responsibilities. Sloth involves neglecting what you are supposed to do with what you would rather do instead.

Characteristics of Sloth: *Sloth has no larger story and, thus, no purpose or meaning.* “No larger story” = a story that defines who you are, why you are here, why you do what you do, and where you are going. This story answers all of these questions for you.

As a Christian your story is given to you in the story of Scripture. Generally, you are a creature, created in the image of God. You exist to be in relationship with God and one day, after your labor is over on this earth, you will enjoy the fruit of your labor in rest with God.

Sloth does not acknowledge this story and does not believe it. Sloth doesn't have, nor does it desire, a context to understand where activity and rest fit in.

Boredom is the result of Sloth. There is no meaning in activity. There is no meaning in rest.

Not wanting to get involved in others lives and only “self-expressing” = Sloth.

Sloth has no hunger or passion. Dorothy Sayers: “In the world it is called Tolerance, but in hell it is called Despair. It is the sin that believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and remains alive because there is nothing for which it will die.”

Sloth is gripped by fear. Note the Slothful servant in Mt. 25. He is afraid to take chances.

Sloth is ultimately unbelief. Faith requires effort. Faith requires working at things, the responsibilities God has given to us and believing him for the results. Sloth gives up on God because either he is a liar or he is not worthy of the effort.

Church guilty of fostering Sloth (no matter what type of Christian church). Mindless ritualism (fault of pastors and congregants alike); entertainment (because people need to “express themselves”; = undisciplined worship, they don't want to put forth any effort).

Sloth always has a thousand justifications/rationalizations. Cf. Prov 26.13-16

When you peel through all the layers of excuses and rationalizations, what you finally see is the fact that the Sloth simply does not believe God. He refuses to work at faith.

2. THE CURE FOR SLOTH

The answer to Sloth is not “work harder” but *faith in the work of Christ*. The answer to the sin of Sloth is found in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the answer to our Sloth is not our work but Jesus' work.

John 6.29 - to work the work of God we must *believe* in Jesus, trust Jesus. What happens when we trust Jesus? We work. cf. Jms 2.

What gives your work and rest meaning is that they are accepted by God in Christ. Cf. 1Cor 15.58.

What we do now as Christians is building for the coming consummated kingdom. What we do now will be taken up, transformed, and used in the consummation of the kingdom. Our labor is not purposeless.

We are not saved by our work, but our work is saved in Christ. Cf. Rev 14.12-13 (“... their works follow them.”)

We come empty-handed, like the servants in Mt 25. The Master fills our hands, leaves, and when he comes back, he expects that we will have turned a profit on what he has given us (i.e., made it fruitful).

The fact that our works are being redeemed in Christ gives meaning and purpose to each and everything that we do. That must be the motivating fire that gives us passion to do what we do with diligence, perseverance, hope, and joy. Sloth gives up on God saying that nothing I'm doing amounts to anything. But the resurrection of Jesus Christ says this is absolutely wrong. Our labor is not in vain in the Lord. Everything we do in faith—that is because we believe God and are seeking to obey him—is part of Christ's kingdom-building project; even if we don't see how.