Proverbs - Commentaries by Hugh Henry Snell

Crumbs for the Lord's Little Ones: Volume 4 (1856), Field of the Slothful., The

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“I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles bad covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. (Prov. 24:30, 31.)

WHEN we think of the wondrous mercy of God that has met us, and saved us, in the death and resurrection of His beloved Son, it is marvelous that we should ever need warning or exhortation to remind us that we are not our own, but bought with a price, and that therefore we should glorify God in our body, and in our spirit, which are God’s. But so it is; and feeling our proneness to err, we often cry out with the Psalmist, “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? —by taking heed thereto according to Thy word.” Sometimes we find ourselves the subjects of carnal zeal and a spirit of self-confidence; at other times we are in danger of indifference to Christ’s honor, carelessness as regards the state of our souls, the character of our walk, and the quality of our service. It is the latter condition that our Lord so solemnly warns us of, when He says, “While the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.” (Matt. 25:5.) Fearful falls and disappointment may be connected with fleshly energy, as we see in the case of Peter, but “slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep;” “by much slothfulness the building decayeth, and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through.” (Eccl. 10:18.) May we solemnly and prayerfully weigh these Scriptures before the Lord, and exhort one another to dedicate ourselves unreservedly to Him who has purchased us with His own blood, that when He comes again He may have to say to each one of us, “Well done, good and faithful servant!”

There are many exhortations in the word of God to “be diligent,” to give “all diligence,” to “abound in diligence,” &c., and many solemn warnings against slothfulness. Among the characteristics of the latter, we may notice first, that the slothful soul hesitates to lay hold of the grace of God in Christ, and to live by the faith of the Son of God as its daily bread. “Be not slothful to go, and to enter to possess the land.” (Judg. 18:9.) A loss of relish for the flesh and blood of Christ, a lack of appetite for the sincere milk of the word, little inclination to draw nigh to God, slowness to apprehend our standing in grace as seated in Christ in heavenly places, are marks that indicate a slumbering and slothful state of soul.

Outward energy is only real when it is accompanied with secret fellowship with God. Spiritual affections, zeal, and intelligence, find their proper element only in the presence of God. There is nothing really spiritual apart from God. Those who do not abide in Christ, do not bring forth fruit. The very life and power of our souls is enjoying all the fullness the Father has given us in Christ. Let it not be said of us, then, “How long are ye slack to go to possess the land, which the Lord God of your fathers giveth you?” (Josh. 18:3.) Our God is “a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.” (Heb. 11:6.) Dissatisfaction and want will be found in that bosom which is a stranger to the blessings connected with diligently searching the holy Scriptures, and obeying the word of the Lord. “An idle soul shall suffer hunger.” (Prov. 19:15.) Our God would have us to receive His word, hide His commandments with us, to incline our ear, and apply our heart to understanding, to cry after knowledge, lift up our voice for understanding, seek her as silver, search for her as for hid treasures; then shall we understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. (Prov. 2). “The soul of the diligent shall be made fat.” (Prov. 13:4.)

A spirit of bondage also is connected with slothfulness— “The slothful shall be under tribute.” (Prov. 12:24.) From the soul not dwelling in God, not living upon Christ, not feasting in th9 banqueting-house, there is no enjoyment of “the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.” Men and things, therefore, have authority upon the heart, which rightly belongs only to Christ; hence their place is found in following in the train of good men, rather than in walking simply before the Lord, with an exercised conscience “in the sight of God the Father”—they are “under tribute,” instead of living as free-born citizens of heaven. To follow Paul only as he followed Christ is not being “under tribute,” but is true fellowship of saints; for they unitedly, and together, glorify God. “The hand of the diligent maketh rich.” (Prov. 10:4.)

Another mark of a slothful spirit is, that if the mind be occupied at all with the truth, it is satisfied with new discoveries, instead of feeding upon the truth, and being anxious that every fresh revelation should be sealed upon the heart. The mind only is exercised, and neither the affections nor the conscience acted upon. “The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting.” (Prov. 12:27.) Their pleasure is only in taking possession of what they sought after, and not in using it for personal refreshment and profit. The indolent man has had his desire gratified in obtaining what he wished, but he has no heart to treasure it up in his soul, to tide its sweetness, or to realize the strength and comfort it is able to minister. It is by patiently and perseveringly meditating upon the truth of God, mixing faith with it, and having it written upon our hearts and minds by the Spirit, that we find that scripture fulfilled in our experience. “Much increase is by the strength of the ox.” (Prov. 14:4.)

Great fear, self-consideration, and a desire for overrating difficulties, are further accompaniments of a slothful spirit. “The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets.” (Prov. 22:13.) Those, however, who hearken to the Lord, shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil. (Prov. 1:33.) “The righteous are bold as a lion;” they know God is their refuge and strength. They trust in Him in whom is everlasting strength. Weakness, lack of divine energy, and pride, are also associated with a slothful spirit. “As a door turneth upon its hinges, so doth the slothful upon his bed. The slothful man hideth his hand in his bosom; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth. The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.” (Prov. 26:14-16.)

Now let us look at the “field of the slothful;” it is covered with weeds, and exposed to the intrusions of every hurtful foe—all grown over with thorns and nettles, and the atone wall thereof broken down. It is indeed a solemn picture, and may well serve to remind us that we are the Lord’s, and not of the world, even as He was not of the world; but, a chosen generation, a holy nation, and a peculiar people, and that our Lord looks for fruit. Naturally we only bring forth thorns and nettles; but God, in mercy, having united us to Him who is raised from the dead, given us the Holy Spirit, and separated us unto Himself by the blood of Jesus, it becomes us to be experimentally separate unto God, bearing much fruit. But, dear brethren, what is the state of our souls now? Are we fruitful in every good work, and diligent in keeping the stone wall

from being broken down? The enemy desires ready access to us, and to our labor in the Lord; but if we are found living as separated unto God by the blood and righteousness of His Son, we shall have an impenetrable shield round about us. When thus we are dwelling in God, we find we have something better than the world, and desire to be God’s witnesses in separation from it, rather than to have the best associations with it. When the warming beams of the Sun of Righteousness, the fertilizing showers of divine grace, and the tender culturing hand of the heavenly Husbandman, are upon us, our souls prosper, and are ready to cry out, “Let my Beloved come into His garden, and eat His pleasant fruits!”

Beloved in Christ! let us beware of slothfulness; let us be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; for God is not unrighteous to forget any work or labor of love in ministering to His saints. The cup of cold water, given in the name of a disciple, shall not lose its reward; the uplifted heart in prayer or praise does not escape His eye; and the tear of sympathy He will treasure up in His bottle.

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