

"The Dangers of the Idle"
2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

When we think of the idea or the concept of being "idle", as Paul warns against, what is the first thought that comes to mind? For many of us, simply put, it is a sense of laziness, one's ability to sit and do nothing for an extended period of time, to put off work, to shun and shy away from one's responsibilities, to procrastinate not for the sake of making an informed decision, but simply because "we don't feel like doing it".

How often do we encounter problems or get into situations where we look at what's going on and we say, "**Well, someone else will deal with that, I'm too tired, or I don't have the time to do this, or I simply don't have the energy.**" I know that I am guilty of this. For example, I have noticed that there are times where the street lights in my road are not working. Instead of me picking up the phone and calling the relevant people to report the issue, I often think to myself, well someone else will probably report the problem so why should I bother. We become so dependent on other people, leaving it up to them because we don't feel like doing it, or we feel like it's not our problem. And this is not simply a present reality problem, a problem that we only face within our day to day routines. We at times take this to the extreme, even within our Christianity and our faith. Does this sound familiar, "**Well God is sovereign over all things, He is in control, therefore, I am going to sit back and let Him deal with it. He will bring me exactly what I need, exactly when I need it and I don't have to do a single thing**"? I believe that this is a huge and very serious problem, a trap that we so easily get caught in, and it is something that we, as Christians, are warned about time and time again. And this is vitally important for the simple reason that if we, as Christians, are idle, well then this gospel would never spread. Imagine for just one second what would have happened if Paul, Peter, Timothy, Barnabas, or any of the apostles and disciples had this attitude, this idea that they can just sit back and do nothing because God will do it? Please don't misunderstand me, I'm not suggesting that God won't do it or that He can't do it, but as believers, as disciples of Christ, are we not commanded to engage in the proclamation of the Gospel? Are we not commanded go out into the world and bring the good news? Are we not ambassadors for Christ? Are we not called to "**live according to the teachings**" given to us, to labour and toil for the sake of God's kingdom? The answer to these are "of course we are!" Yet, we spend so much time focusing on and giving so much attention to the dangers of physical idleness, that we do not necessarily pay attention to the way in which we carry out the command not to be idle... Is Paul not right in saying that "they (sometimes we fall into the 'they' category here) are not busy, they are busy-bodies".

We flail around, driving ourselves crazy, keeping ourselves so busy so as to stay away from laziness or idleness. We work ourselves to the bone thinking that we are making great strides and leaps forward and yet it is not being busy... it is being a busy-body. Paul has his focus here on three very specific aspects of keeping clear of idleness: **v.6 - "Live according to the teaching you received from us"**, **v.7 - "Follow our example"** and **v. 9 "in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow."** Notice, that these are not simply Paul's imaginings, they are not his own ideas but rather, Paul is reflecting what he himself has been taught by Christ, whether by His word or by His actions. Now as important as this staying clear from physical idleness is, I believe that there is a much deeper danger when we look at idleness, and it is a danger that we constantly overlook... It is the danger of an idle Christian mind.

We look at our Christianity today and we equate that with going to church every Sunday, being part of a fellowship group or Bible study, with think it has something to do with one's ability to call to mind a specific passage or verse from scripture to fit with certain situations. And this is not necessarily a wrong concept but I suggest that it is only half of the story. You see, what we have been discussing up until now, the physical response within our faith, is vitally important... but it becomes a problem firstly, when our Christian thoughts do not match our Christian actions, and secondly, when our Christian actions are done merely to project an outward image.

The two, Christian thought and Christian action, must go hand-in-hand. But we spend so much time focusing on the actions that we often forget about the thoughts, and idle minded Christianity is

equally as dangerous, if not more dangerous, than physical idleness. Why? Well there are four reasons I suggest this is so.

Firstly, with an idle Christian mind, we run the risk of losing touch with what a true and intimate relationship with the Lord requires. If we focus solely on the physical, outward image of our Christianity, without strengthening and exercising the Christian mind, then our faith is simply performance based. The Word of God holds true and remarkable transformational power that changes the mind which in turn, will change the lifestyle. If we lose sight of this, then we are no better off than those who were under the Law. Without allowing the Word of God to transform the mind, we in essence conform to what society and culture dictate to us, living according to set of rules or guidelines dictated to us. The problem with conformity is that we will always be changing, trying to fit in with the next best thing. Transformation is an absolute, yes, we are always transforming, but it remains constant in line with the Word of God.

Secondly, an idle Christian mind runs the risk of building an image rather than building character. Again, this problem comes in when the Christian life becomes performance based. It is easy for us to think that the routines of our Christian lives are enough, and I'm speaking now particularly of the outward actions, but it is not these things that build character. Character is built by those things that we do in private, when no one is looking, when we don't have people praising us for a job well done. Therefore, we should constantly be reflecting on whether or not our actions are in line with our thoughts, and whether or not our thoughts are in line with the word of God.

Thirdly, an idle Christian mind will wander away from Christ. The mind is mysterious and wonderful thing. It loves information, knowledge and understanding... but we need to remember that what we feed the mind is what we ultimately become. It is essential that we feed our minds with the word of God. If we do not anchor our minds to His word, or to the truths of Christ, then eventually we might find that they will become resistant towards Him.

And finally, an idle Christian mind runs the risk of spiritual compromise. Spiritual compromise happens when the mind becomes spiritually weak, when it ceases to hunger and thirst after the Word of God. We need to consciously make the decision to come to Him through His word, through prayer, through quiet times, allowing the holy Spirit to teach our spirit, then allowing our spirit to instruct our minds, wills and emotions, and ultimately, allowing those to instruct the body.

At the end of the day, we will all be held accountable to the Lord for the things we have done, as **2 Corinthians 5:10** says, “ **For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.**” We are all responsible for the things done while in this body, but we are also responsible for the things we've thought, no exceptions. Do not get caught up in the hustle and bustle of creating an outward image only, but allow the mind to be transformed by the power of God's word, and be cautious so as to not be an idle Christian.

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