



SLOTHFULNESS AND DILIGENCE

10:4, 26; 12:11, 24; 13:4, 23; 15:19; 18:9; 19:15, 24;
20:4, 13; 21:5, 25-26; 22:13, 29; 24:30-34; 27:18

The Scriptures have much to say upon the subject of **sloth** and **diligence**. These **proverbs** also deal with the subject, and can be applied to both the **physical** and the **spiritual** realm.

“He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich” [10:4].

Two types of people are spoken of in this proverb, the “*slack*” and the “*diligent*” The word “*slack*” means “*not using due care, negligent, slowness, sluggishness, depressed, stagnant*” It has reference to those who are **careless** and **remiss** in their business, those who are **negligent** of that which should be foremost. The word “*diligent*” means “*steady, earnest, and energetic effort*” It has reference to the **industrious**, the **conscientious**, the **persistent**, the **tenacious**, and the **committed**. The “*diligent*” seizes opportunities and is determined and not easily discouraged, while he that is “*slack*” neglects opportunities and is easily discouraged and deterred. This proverb presents the consequence of both **slackness** and **diligence**, and what is said here is certainly true in the spiritual realm. The scriptures commend spiritual diligence [Romans 12:11; I Thessalonians 5:6; II Peter 3:14].

“As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes so is the sluggard to them that send him” [10:26].

In this proverb the “*sluggard*” (one who lacks energy and alertness, one who is an idler and shirker) is said to be a **vexation**, an **annoyance**, and an **irritation** to their employers, or those who depend upon them.

“He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread: but he that followeth vain persons is void of understanding” [12:11].

The same truth is presented in Proverbs 28:19. Every man has his land to till, some calling to be employed in. The phrase “*he that tilleth his land*” has reference to the one who seizes the opportunity of his calling or responsibility, and uses his time and energy to fulfill his calling. The phrase “*he that followeth vain persons*” refers to the one who follows an idle course of living, and such an individual is void of insight.

“The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute” [12:24].

Again, the “*diligent*” and the “*slothful*” are contrasted. The phrase “*The hand of the diligent shall bear rule*” teaches that **diligence** (industry) is the path to advancement. This truth is illustrated in Genesis 47:6; and in I Kings 11:28, and by the faithful steward being made ruler over his lord’s household [Matthew 24:45]. The phrase “*But the slothful shall be under*

tribute” teaches that sloth (laziness, idleness, inactivity, and apathy) is enslaving! The “*slothful*” individual is the slave of his own lust and is wicked and unprofitable [Matthew 25:26-30].

“The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat” [13:4].

The “*sluggard*” is full of wishes and desires for the gain that diligence brings, but without the diligence! This proverb teaches that that the path to poverty is sloth and that the path to gain is diligence. Again, this is true in the spiritual realm as well [I Timothy 4:7-8].

“Much food is in the tillage of the poor: but there is that is destroyed for want of judgment” [13:23].

The first line of this proverb “*Much food is in the tillage of the poor*” teaches how a small estate may be improved by industry. The idea conveyed is that, the poor farmers that have but little land, but are diligent with what they have, shall have what they need! The lesson is DILIGENTLY USE WHAT YOU HAVE! The second line of the proverb “*but there is that is destroyed for want (lack) of judgment*” teaches that a great estate may be ruined by the indiscretion of sloth [Ecclesiastes 10:18].

“The way of the slothful man is an hedge of thorns: but the way of the righteous is made plain” [15:19].

Two ways are here contrasted “*the way of the slothful*” and “*the way of the righteous*” implying that sloth is unrighteous or sinful! The “*way of the slothful*” is described as “*an hedge of thorns*” being made so by his own conduct! A “*hedge of thorns*” speaks of difficulty, painfulness, and entrapment! The “*way of the righteous*” is described as “*plain*” or not convoluted, entangled, and twisted!

“He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster” [18:9].

The “*slothful*” and the “*waster*” are alike! The “*slothful*” has no heart for his work and therefore important opportunities slip by, and are wasted, squandered, misspent, and misused!

“Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger” [19:15].

A “*slothful*” disposition stupefies and makes one senseless and mindless of their affairs, as if they were cast into a deep sleep. SLOTHFULNESS IMPOVERISHES!

“A slothful man hideth his hand in his bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again” [19:24].

Slothfulness grows on its victim, so much so, that he has no heart to do even necessary things for himself, and would rather suffer the pangs of hunger, than make the exertion of putting food in his mouth.

“The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing” [20:4].

The **sluggard** is always looking for an excuse to put off work, and is always able to defend or justify his sloth, and has no perseverance in work. The second line of this proverb reiterates the fact that SLOTHFULNESS IMPOVERISHES!

“Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread” [20:13].

The exhortation *“Love not sleep”* has reference to the **sleep of laziness** [6:4, 9-10], and speaks of those who indulge themselves in ease. The exhortation *“Love not sleep”* is followed by a warning *“lest thou come to poverty”* Again, SLOTHFULNESS IMPOVERISHES! This warning is followed by another exhortation *“open thine eyes”* which is another way of saying *“shake off the desire of ease”* and this is followed by a promise *“thou shalt be satisfied with bread”*

“The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness; but of every one that is hasty only to want” [21:5].

Throughout the proverbs the *“diligent”* are contrasted with the *“slothful”* but here with the *“hasty”* The *“diligent”* are those who actively do their work, and the *“hasty”* are those who manage their affairs without due consideration.

“The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour. He coveteth greedily all the day long; but the righteous giveth and spareth not” [21:25-26].

The desire for food, raiment, and riches prove to be a vexation to the **slothful** individual, because of his refusal to work. SLOTHFULNESS BRINGS MISERY! The **slothful** individual is also prey to coveteousness. *“But the righteous giveth and spareth not”* The *“righteous”* by God blessing his labor, not only has enough for himself, but for the relief of others also. The *“slothful”* becomes a burden and a drain to others, while the *“diligent”* becomes a blessing to others. This is true not only in the physical realm, but in the spiritual realm also. The contrast is between the *“slothful”* and the *“righteous”* implying that it is unrighteous and sinful to be slothful!

“The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets” [22:13].

The teaching here is the same as in Proverbs 20:4. The **slothful** individual imagines difficulties that are not even there, and are easily deterred and distracted from their work by any inconvenience.

“Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean (obscure) men” [22:29].

The teaching here is the same as in Proverbs 12:24. “A man diligent in his business” is one who is **conscientious, painstaking, thorough, earnest, persevering, zealous, dedicated, and committed** to his calling and opportunities, and such an individual shall be honored.

“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 had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well; I looked upon it, and received instruction. Yet a little sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man” [24:30-34].

Solomon describes a piece of property that he saw, and he says that “*it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles* (prickly weeds) *had covered the face thereof*” He then went on to describe a wall that was on this piece of property “*and the stone wall thereof was broken down*” At one time the “*field*” and the “*vineyard*” had great promise, and flourished, and was beautiful to look upon, and was of great benefit to the owner, BUT THE GOOD THAT WAS ONCE THERE HAS BEEN CHOKED AND STRANGLERED THROUGH SLOTH! The owner of this piece of land had opportunities that he did not use, gifts and abilities that he did not employ, he trifled with that which demanded his attention, and the result was “*thorns and nettles*” and a “*broken down*” wall! SLOTHFULNESS IMPOVERISHES!

“Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof; so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured” [27:18].

The teaching of this proverb is that **industry, diligence, and dedication** will be recompensed and honored.

These proverbs serve as a warning against **sloth** and an encouragement to **diligence, faithfulness, and constancy**. Again, what is taught in these proverbs concerning **slothfulness** and **diligence** is true in both the physical and the spiritual realm.
