

Prov. 6:6-11; 26:13-16; I Cor. 15:58; The Worker in Proverbs I. The Lazy Man II. The Industrious Man  
 Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, work is a bad word to many. Many people play the lottery- or go to the Queen of Hearts raffle- in order to strike it rich and quick their jobs. In a recent Gallup poll, 77% of workers surveyed hate their jobs. Although the jobless rate has fallen to 3.9 percent- a historic low- it seems that most people would rather not work- they only go to work because they have to. But what is work- and should we view it as a necessary evil? You will remember that God created man to work in the beginning- even before God gave Adam a wife God gave Adam a job! Rule over this world- till the ground and bring over and abundance from this earth. Subdue and have dominion. However, after the fall the joy and prosperity of this work on earth was marred by toil-filled sweat and thorns. The burden is new- but the task itself is not! So how should we approach our daily task in this present world? We will consider this theme: Jesus Christ restores a proper, wise view of work.

### **I. The Lazy Man**

We start by considering the negative- the book of Proverbs presents a view that is to be avoided at all costs. And that picture is the picture of the lazy man- known as the sluggard. I used to drive a sluggish car- you step on the gas and it did nothing. So is the sluggard man- you can prod him but he will do nothing! The word sluggard is “atsel” and it literally means slothful and it used 14 times in this book. Now children, you know what the sloth is- that slow animal that lives in the South American rainforest. Spending almost its entire life hanging upside down in a tree. The word “sloth” means slow- they move so slow that algae grows in its hair- moving so slow that predators do not think that it is even alive! Well- the lazy man is like the sloth. A lazy man is known by what he does and what He does not do. What does the slothful man do? Well- he sleeps 6:9-10 says. He loves sleep in fact- slow to rise and hesitant to work. Living a life of continual ease and folding his hands to rest. We can call this man the lazy fool. The lifestyle is a rebellion against God and His created order- and as we have seen actions have consequences. Even if he goes to work- he does the minimum required. We live in a society of

ease- there is an abundance of distractions and entertainment and the necessities of life are usually within one's grasp. Failing to prioritize, he has a life of ease and little of lasting value is attained. He is also known by what he does not do. He does not plan and prepare, refusing to do the work and carry through. He does not till and plant- thus he has nothing to gather in the harvest. His field sits idle- overwhelmed by thorns and thistles- and overrun by wild beasts. He puts his hand into the dish- but is too lazy to pick the bread out and bring it towards his lips! He may catch an animal in the forest, but he leaves the carcass to rot. He may have raw grain, but he fails to crush the grain and bake the bread! There is almost a humorous picture presented! He is like a hinge on a door in 26:14- constantly turning but never going anywhere! Too weary to bring the food in his hand to his mouth! He is a fool who is wise in his own eyes- refusing to receive correction as 26:16 says. He knows what is easy and does what is right in his own eyes. Always taking the easy path- the broad way! Thus his land and his house- his investments and his heritage fall into disrepair. He is not trustworthy- nor is he dependable. Unwilling to put forth the effort that it takes for success- because it is hard or remotely dangerous he stops. As 26:13 illustrates- there might be a lion outside- and it might come after me- so to keep safe I will stay indoors. It is either too hot or too cold- it might rain so why even try to till the soil- I could get stuck or catch a cold. Fear immobilizes him and he remains content in his dream-like state. Now what this sloth does and does not do has immediate consequences. The first level of consequence is seen in 6:11- poverty and want will come upon him and overpower him like an armed man. Sudden and swift destruction. Not only will he and his family come into want- they will have nothing to eat in the winter- whatever they have stored up will be lost! This leads to poverty and oppression. As 12:24 says, laziness ends in forced labor. Foolishness leads to bondage- the whip and slavery! The fool falls into debt to others- refuses to repay and loses it all! Mere talk without labor leads to poverty. Basically, the sluggard lets the curse win- they refuse to fight the battle as they quickly give in and give up! In the process they lose their identity and purpose in this world- they become a fixed fixture on the wall of a

moving world. Their life has no purpose but to eat and drink for tomorrow they die. Laziness can come in many forms- you can be lazy in spirit and lazy in the flesh. Progress in the spiritual or physical world takes effort! But as II Thes. 3:10 says- if you will not work then you will not eat! To be clear, this is not a rebuke for those who cannot work- for those who because of disability or age cannot bear the strain of toil. But rather this rebuke is for those who let others do what they should and can do! It is a rebuke of welfare society which in the end makes everyone poor! The fact is- if you are able you must find something to do! A present-day proverb says- idle hands are the devil's workshop. There is truth to this point! God put us in this world to do something- to bring about something! Even Jesus was always busy with His Father's work as John 5 says. So the way of wisdom and blessing is not found in the sluggard and his sloth! For easy is the path and broad the way that leads to destruction!

## **II. The Industrious Man**

But Proverbs has another man to contrast this fool and his laziness- that is the wise man in his industry! What happens is that Jesus restores work to its rightful place! Christ recommissions His people into industrious service! Work is no longer a vain, meaningless thing! We are not hamsters on a wheel with no hope of progress! No- not at all! In fact, Christ restores man to his proper place- new creations filled with knowledge and holiness- so that we perceive the truth in order to engage in and even enjoy work! There is great satisfaction in a job well done! Work and worship are not opposing forces. The cultural mandate for us has become part of our spiritual calling. In other words, every valid vocation is capable of glorifying God and enjoying Him and His blessings! From the plumber to the painter- to those who clean teeth or clean toilets. We can do all things- whatever our work- to the glory of God as I Cor. 10 says. And when each task is done to the glory of God- each duty is done in thankfulness- it becomes part of our necessary and God pleasing good works. Our work is not to gain something from God- but rather we commit ourselves to doing our work because of what Christ has done for us! As Col. 3:24 says, it is Christ you are serving! Or as Col. 3 says, we work diligently and faithfully because we are

working unto the Lord! Christ has restored work to its proper place- not an end to itself- but as part of the life of thanksgiving that we are each called to live! So we will seek to be hard working- doing our best in whatever we are called to do! As both men and women- who work inside and outside of the home. Or as younger children whose work is to be diligent in their schooling- or older members during their sunset years. In each situation Jesus restores work to its proper, good place! We can each remain in our station- being transformed into a Christian act of praise! So who do we work for? Not men- but unto the Lord! Why do we work- because we are thankful for all that Jesus Christ has given to us and for the blessings from our heavenly Father. How should we work- diligently and regularly! Consider the ant of 6:6. She knows the seasons and she prepares for the future. She makes hay while the sun shines- or as a present-day proverb says- early to bed and early to rise makes you healthy, wealthy and wise! Instead of sleeping the summer and fall away- she prepares, works and gathers. Like the wise woman of Proverbs 31- she does not worry when winter comes because she has prepared her house! A wise worker is prudent and dependable! Being kind to others and even generous. Treating others as they would like to be treated. The wise ones work hard so that they might have something to share with those in need as II Thes. 3 says. The wise man is even kind to his animals as 12:10 says- having regard for the life of their beasts! A wise Christian sees himself as a steward. This world and its riches are gifts to be used, guarded and preserved. Every ability we have and each moment of the day a talent for which we will have to give an account. In wisdom they pay their bills and their workers on time. Working hard each day- and taking joy and pleasure in what they do. But they also know when to cease- to say that it is enough. They come to know that there is a time for everything- a time for work but also a time for relaxation! A time to save and a time to spend. A time for daily labor and a time for rest! A pastor once told me that “the reason that most people do not rest on Sunday is because they do not work hard enough the other 6 days.” Yes work is good, but rest is also a gift from God! Not only must we take time for our families, we must not neglect our duty to go up to the house of the LORD and offer

our gifts before Him in corporate worship. There is a perfect rest that God has entered into- a place and time for rest in the world that is to come! The sweat filled toil and labor finds its answer in rest- and it is this rest that we look forward to! Rest is all the sweeter after you have first worked and become tired! As Prov. 3:24 says, when you lie down your sleep will be sweet! But there are also blessings in this life to be found when you are wise in your work! The good, normal consequence of daily labor is the blessings of profit. 14:23 says, in all toil there is profit. The ant is rewarded with food for the winter. So we should normally expect the laborer to receive his wage! Instead of the lack and poverty, wise laborers normally enjoy the blessings of food and drink! This is a good consequence woven into God's normal providence! And as we pray- give us each day our daily bread- so we look to the Lord who uses work to provide us with that bread! All our work does us no good unless the Lord's blessing is upon it! Or as Prov. 30 says, feed me with the food that is necessary for me. Our identity is not found in our work- our citizenship is not secured by our labor. Your life is found in Christ, and He is the reason that we work diligently and joyfully. So we do, as Psalm 90 says, ask God to establish the work of our hands for His glory and our good! We exert ourselves and are diligent in our labor within our individual context for the benefit of our community and the glory of our God!

To conclude, a Christian worldview of labor is neither socialism nor capitalism. It is sanctified stewardship- a holy service within our own vocation. Jesus Christ restores a proper, wise view of work. So beware laziness in physical and in spiritual things- knowing that our labor in the Lord is not in vain! See work as it should be- a created task redeemed by Christ which is useful and good in this world! Work gives us direction- and has a sanctified purpose! So rejoice as Ecc. 3 says- do good as long as you live and take pleasure in your toil- for this is God's gift to man.