



Will you be a joke to God?

by Calvin G. Seerveld

Did you know that the Bible tells at least one joke about sluggards, and quite openly pokes fun of the slothful who "lack heart"? It says that they "lack faith-guts"!

The sluggard says,

"A roaring beast is out in the street!
There's a lion outside somewhere in the square!"

[Like] a door creaks slowly open on its hinges
is the way an indolent man turns over again in his bed;
the sluggard buries his hand deep into a bowl of food,
but it just about exhausts him to get it back up to his mouth again.

Yes, the idle fellow thinks himself to be more wise
than any seven people who can give you an intelligent answer.

(Proverbs 26:13-16)

I was walking past the field of a slothful man, that is,
up to and around the farm of somebody who simply lacked guts;
and would you believe it!
the whole works was overgrown with prickly weeds
- a kind of bramble underbrush covered whatever you could see,
and the stone wall was a broken-down [rim] !

I looked at it all, I did, quite closely, and took it deeply to heart;

I stared at it [till] I could catch on to whatever it was that would pull me
back into line:

"Just a little more sleep, just a tiny little more lullaby sleep!
only a little more twiddling-thumb-de-dum time hanging around - "
[is what the guy had said] ...

then this improverished disintegration you deserve drops in on you like a
vagabond tramp,
and the whole gamut of bankrupt void you have coming accosts you like a
man with a gun!

(Proverbs 24: 30-34)

A genuine sluggard can think up the most fantastic rationalizations for not getting on with his work - "I can't go outside! There's a lion out there who will eat me alive!" Slothful people, says the Scriptures, waste time, are stupidly selfish, smug, and shirk doing the dirty work that needs to be done, till doing nothing finally does them in. When you grow into idleness, says Proverbs, suddenly the Lord! will surprise you like a tramp or an armed stick-up man in the night, and confront you with the empty nothingnesses on your hands. And what then?

It would be a bad mistake to think the joking here is indulgent. As if we're all a little bit lazy, who doesn't procrastinate and want to sleep past the alarm now and then? Just let things go till you are in a mess - deadlines are made for man and not man for the deadlines - but a O.K., you've made your New Year's resolutions to be more prompt, diligent and energetic. Thanks for the tip, Solomon

No. Such a reading misses the terrible life-or-death dimension to the irony and *paideia* of the joke and parable before us. Proverbs 26 and appendix to 24 is not just pointing out the faults that bug the so-called "Protestant work ethic," as if sloth is what ruins the equation of

Early to bed,
early to rise,
makes a man healthy,
wealthy and wise.

No. You miss God's Word if all you hear is a condemnation of those who lack industry as defined by the all-American, get-up-and-go activity normally crowned by success. Then Proverbs would be inviting a self-righteous smile on the face of every middle-class citizen. After all, we hard working people are not sluggards, are we?

I have seen them

I have seen them. I have seen them in government offices shuffling papers and passing the buck. The drones of chic-dressed secretaries in banks and functionaries idling with their spoons at the holy moment of the coffee break. I have watched middle-aged bureaucrats in their high-rise business offices go through an everlasting routine, and seen professional men busy busy answering the minutiae of jangling telephones, treading water. Subway commuters at rush hour pressed

like zombies toward exits, and factory workers with the spark gone from their eyes make way for the next shift. And their lives were all overgrown with prickly weeds! Brambles of discontent and a broken-down, dogged dullness - waiting for the promotion, hanging on till the pension comes, or dumbly, trapped, half-willingly going through the motions of the tedium, in disrepair, twiddling one's thumbs.

Teachers can a course and repeat it for a decade. Preachers use old sermons to make time for counseling, administrative duties, or golf. Pot-boiling artists and professional performers use their one successful gimmick again and again respectable . . . sluggards! sloth undiluted! Because they lack guts, says Proverbs, lack the heart of faith to turn their closed, parasitic, oh! so safe, horizontal life into an open adventure of responding ever new to the call of the Lord IN their daily work.

You do not avoid idleness, as the Bible understands it, by putting in a solid five or six day work week. **The point is: did your routine today reach out with healing that the Holy Spirit could establish for the coming of Jesus Christ's Rule upon the earth?** Else your activity was as idle as the one who stayed abed.

Lion-sized excuses

Too many professing Christian sluggards come with their lion-sized excuses: "You don't expect me to fight the whole bloody, giant corporation myself, do you?" (cf. I Samuel 17) "My identity crisis is not yet resolved!" (cf. John 3: 1-21) "I can't talk with those pros. . . ." (cf. Exodus 3-4) "I've just married a wife and gotten a new house with an enormous mortgage - what can I do?" (cf. Luke 14:16-24) "I knew you were a hard man, Lord, and that you wanted a safe return on your investment in me; so I went to church regularly, tithed, led a decent life, didn't get into trouble, and here is your whole talent back like it was -" Go to hell, says the Lord (Matthew 25:14-30), you sluggard! You never got past watching the ant (proverbs 6:6-11) in its animal industry. You mistook Paul's rejection of free-loaders in the Christian community, those who don't pay their bills by sweat but absolve themselves by

"visions from heaven" on their specialness (11 Thessalonians 3: 6-12): maybe you mistook that to mean moonlighting is a saving virtue? Or you thought that by imitating Christ's foot-washing at least, by joining a do-gooding civic organization in the community, you could cover up your basic indolence?

No deal, says God Almighty. **If you lack the guts of faith to build up My special Rule upon the earth in your daily activities, then your basic, bankrupt condition shall be exposed by Me like a thief in the night, and you shall lose, with shame, everything you have piled up for yourself.**

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The antidote to sloth, whose end is destruction, is not to work yourself to death (cf. Psalm 127:1-2; Proverbs 10:22), but first of all to convert your deed into action that Yahweh Himself will want to finish off with shalom (Proverbs 25:21-22, cf. *Vanguard*, May-June 1972); And then (on pain of apostasy!) not to settle down sluggishly into a milk-fed Christian life, but become mature, "start acting like people driven by faith and a confident forbearance, hanging on to inherit the riches of what God has promised!" (Hebrews 5: 11-6: 12, cf. *For God's Sake Run With Joy*, p. 186ff.) Only then will your life not be joke to God.

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