

FOR PRODUCTIVE LIVES: LABOR

God created man to be productive. Even before the “fall,” Adam was given the responsibility of tending the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15), with Eve as his helper (v. 18). After man sinned, his labors were intensified (vs. 17-19). Being without modern labor-saving devices, Adam had to rely upon his own ingenuity, God-given skills and hard effort. While mankind has progressed technology to lessen the burdens, the mandate has not been lifted. Adam was no “couch potato,” nor is it God’s will that any person of sufficient health and opportunity should shirk the responsibility of honest productive labor. It may not always be physically strenuous labor, but productive labor nevertheless. A part of Christian character is to endeavor to be productive in the care, not only of one’s self, but also one’s family. So serious is this responsibility, that the apostle Paul declared plainly, “If any man provide not for his own, and especially those of his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel” (1 Timothy 5:8). The man who would purposely seek a lethargic lifestyle will certainly lose self-respect, the respect of others, and, most tragically, the respect of God. While it is obvious that those unfortunates who, because of various handicaps, are unable to care for themselves and their families, are incapable of productivity, those who, with good health, class themselves as being worthy of “entitlements” are cursing themselves and all of society. Paul encountered this attitude among the Thessalonian Christians, as some, possibly expecting the soon-return of Christ, sought to live off the brethren without laboring. Of such, he wrote, “For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat” (2 Thess. 3:10), then urging that such “work, and eat their own bread” (v. 12). The word of God gives no slack for those who are slothful.

It is not surprising that God expects His children to also labor fervently in the spiritual realm, as well as the physical. Jesus, in instructing His disciples, frequently compared service to Him in parables depicting laborers. We are to be laborers in the vineyard of the Lord (Matthew 20:1 f.f.). As farmers on the Lord’s farm, we are expected to put our hand to the plow, and not look back (Luke 9:52). Upon the Lord’s return, we will give an accounting for our labors, and sadly, some will hear Him say, “Cast the wicked and unprofitable servant into outer darkness” (Matt. 25:30). Referring to the Hebrew Christians’ “labor of love” and their ministry to the saints (believers), the writer of Hebrews urges “diligence”, then admonishing, “that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Heb. 6:10-12). While there is no merit wherein we gain salvation through our good works, a genuine faith will be a faith that serves the Lord to the extent of one’s ability and opportunity. If we were to be perfect in our works, we would still have to admit ourselves to be “unprofitable servants,” inasmuch as we have simply “done that which was our duty to do” (Luke 17:10). There will be no point in this life when we can say, “I’ve done enough.” The Lord has no “retirement plan” for us in this life.. It is only when, after a lifetime of service, we “die in the Lord” that the faithful will at the close of day “rest from their labors,” with the assurance that the believers “works do follow them” (Revelation 14:13). May we, therefore, be admonished by

Paul: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58)

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