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THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF OUR LORD

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There was recently an organized movement to put the Christmas story and the Christmas songs out of the public schools of New York City. Our whole country became interested and even excited. There is another movement which may well cause us deeper concern, though it is being carried on so quietly that we scarcely notice it. It is a movement to put the Christmas story out of the Bible itself. The whole trend of modern, radical criticism is to deny the Virgin Birth of our Lord, and practically all of the incidents which go to make up the beautiful story of his birth. One quotation will suffice to show to what lengths some of these critical scholars go. It is from Soltan's "Birth of Jesus Christ." "An evangelical Christian, that is to say a Christian holding fast in his religious convictions to the gospel of the Apostles and the Apostolic school, is no longer able to believe in the supernatural origin of Jesus. * * * Whoever makes the further demand that an evangelical Christian shall believe in the words, 'Conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary' wittingly constitutes himself sharer in a sin against the Holy Spirit of the true gospel as transmitted to us by the Apostles and their school in the Apostolic Age."

Nor is this denial of the Virgin Birth confined to the critical schools of Germany. It is creeping into the modern pulpit. The City Temple in London is one of the great pulpits of the world, and in the days of Dr. Joseph Parker the pure gospel was preached there in great power. Dr. R. J. Campbell, a minister of wonderful gifts and of wonderful personal mag-

'THE UNIVERSAL OBLIGATION TO LABOR'

PROF. T. C. JOHNSON, D. D.

This we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.—2 Thess. 3: 10.

The Apostle Paul was singularly endowed with ability to fix upon the chief, and the distinguishing, characteristics of every people whom he addressed. Since the days of Jerome, commentators have seen reflected in the Epistle to the Romans, the simplicity, the order, the power, and the haughtiness of that people. They have seen mirrored in the letters to the Corinthians, the intellectual pride of *that* people, their social looseness—the men, accustomed to the free use of wine in their temples, carrying the custom into their Church assemblies; the women, boldly sitting in public with head uncovered, both sexes given to factious behavior, and wanting sadly in Christian self-control. They have seen portrayed, in the Epistle to the Galatians, the inconstant and passionate nature of the Celt; and they have seen, in the letters to the Thessalonians, perfect indications of the Macedonian type of character. Through Jerome we learn that, in his day, the first quarter of the fifth century, Macedonians continued to exhibit “the same virtues of charity, hospitality, fraternal good-will” and “the same vices of indolence, aimless lounging, petty meanness in making oneself a parasite for the sake of daily food,” which the epistle would lead us to attribute to one section of the people in Paul’s day.

Understanding the character of the people with whom he dealt, he adapted his teaching thereto. Naturally we find the words of our text addressed to the Thessalonians. Christianity is nothing if not a religion of virtuous vigor. The great apostolic exponent of Christianity desired that the idle, lounging, parasitical people should cease to be idlers and should acquit themselves as men.

In the verses preceding our text he tells them that he had wrought with labor and travail night and day that he might not be chargeable to them; and that he had done so that he *might*

be an example unto them; that he had thus exerted himself that they might cease to idle, to lounge and to play the parasite, and go to working. Having reproduced in this way the bearing and the aims of his life amongst them, he repeats a command, which he affirms he had given them while with them. He says, "For even when we were with you, *this we commanded you, that if any would not work neither should he eat.*"

What Paul had said, as the Greek text shows, was, "*If a man is unwilling to work he shall not eat.*"

This saying looks like an adaptation of certain proverbs current in Jewish schools, such as, "Whosoever doth not work, doth not eat." "Let not him who would not labor before the Sabbath, eat on the Sabbath." Paul's form is an improvement. It distinctly regards the disposition of the heart and spirit. "*If a man is unwilling to work, he shall not eat.*"

If a man is unwilling to work: This condition is not that of unwillingness to do a given kind of labor, physical labor, say. Paul claims in the preceding verse that he had had a right to *support* at the hands of the Thessalonians (in virtue of his spiritual services) even though he had not wrought with his hands. He had waived that right. The condition of the text is that of unwillingness to toil in some mode or other to add to the sum of the common well-being.

He shall not eat. It is not a matter of doubt that this prohibition is representative; that it carries not only its literal force, but, like the prohibitions of the Decalogue, everything in the genus to which the thing prohibited literally belongs. He shall not eat the fruits of labor; he shall not drink the fruits of labor; he shall not feast his eyes on the fruits of labor; he shall not *enjoy* the fruits of labor *in any way*. The writer naturally expresses the general truth in the specific and concrete form chosen; because of the language of the kindred Jewish proverbs; and because this form was specifically applicable to the sponging parasites in the churches of Thessalonica; but it is plain that he here inculcates the general truth, that if a man or woman is unwilling to work to add his share to the sum of good enjoyable by men, he shall not enjoy.

We have spoken of the apostle's meaning in these words, and properly, since *he* says, "This *we* commanded you that if any man would not work, neither should he eat." Let us remember, however, that he was the mouthpiece of God; and that therefore it is the revealed will of God—that God commands—that "*if any man will not work, neither shall he eat.*"

With this understanding of the fulness of its meaning, out of deference to its phraseology we shall take as the proposition of the text the following: *It is a principle of God's revealed will that if any man will not work, neither shall he enjoy.*

The fact that the Thessalonians were insufficiently impressed by the mere command of the apostle suggests that it may be entirely profitable to strive to impress on our minds the truth of the proposition by arguing it. Hence, you are now invited to attend the following arguments in support of it:

We argue:

1st. *That the God of Providence seems, on the whole, to move on analogous principles in dealing with the world of lower animals.*

Amongst the animals beneath man it seems to be true, within limits and in the long run, that he that will not work shall not eat. Many species of wild animals, from the insects to the mammal, would perish utterly were it not for the toil of the individuals of the species in providing, under the promptings of instinct, shelters from cold and storm, and food sufficient for inclement seasons. Many species would perish utterly but for the toil of the individuals in traveling to more favorable climates with the changing seasons. In the case of some species, the individuals of which toil not, they die in shoals and the species are only preserved through eggs and larvæ left by the individuals now dead. In the case of some other species, the individuals of which toil not to gather food, nor to form shelters, nor in traveling to hospitable climates, if the species becomes not extinct, the individuals lose sadly in well-being.

The contrast in the condition of domesticated and undomesticated animals points in the same direction. The animals that toil for the service of man do in fact multiply and flourish as the undomesticated and untoiling of the same families do not.

The urus is extinct; and the wild buffalo promises soon to be extinct. The domestic ox, on the other hand, becomes in number like the sand grains on the seashore. To be literal and homely, even the misused and ill-fed cattle of our black peasants enjoy more of well-being than would a wild ox running on our hills at will.

Biologists tell us that in proportion as the organization of animal life rises in complexity, height and perfection, in the same proportion nature, or nature's God, seems to have written in the very structure the necessity of labor in order to enjoying. Thus the God of providence acts on the principle of our text in the lower animal world.

But the God of providence is the God of revelation; as the careful student of both systems sees; as the Scriptures teach, and as our Lord implied in all his parabolic teaching. The God of providence works on analogous principles, too, in the several departments of his infinite and all-embracing rule. This is an assumption, also, underlying Christ's parabolic teaching. Hence, from God's acting on this principle in the lower animal world, there is a presumption that He will be found acting on it in the human sphere; and that the teaching of our text is therefore true.

That if a man is not willing to work, neither shall he eat, is a principle of the revealed will of God, we argue from the consideration:

2d. *That in the secular history of mankind, so far as it can be seen, the principle seems on the whole to be applied.*

Generally, and in the long run, it seems to be true that the men that labor enjoy. The application of the principle is obscured by the presence of rich, idle and sometimes dissolute drones, who from a distance seem to be enjoying good things. It is obscured by the existence of certain lounging, sponging, parasites who hover about the courts of rulers and the palaces of the rich and who at times profess themselves most happy. But it is confidently asserted that the principle is in application in the very cases which seem to be in its teeth.

The drones amongst the rich, and the sponging parasites, hangers-on around the tables of the rich, are not enjoying as

many suppose. The worst forms of immorality are breeding amongst them—murders, duels, elopements and all nastiness, wrecking the peace of families, diverting the affections from every lawful channel and quenching every noble emotion and all high aspirations. Bodily and mental diseases are breeding amongst them; and meddlesomeness of mind and heart. It is the teaching of secular history, that a man must work if he would shun the grosser evils; that he must work if he would be healthy in body and in mind; that he must work if he would be no busy-body, but behaving himself well.

The people who enjoy are the people who labor with hands or head, or with both hands and head. Their happiness is truer, nobler and more abiding. They generally live longer and possess more. The great industrious, thrifty, useful classes have most of the happiness relatively worth calling so, in this world. A contrast between two historic individuals may serve to make this clearer. A few years ago there lived in the city of Pittsburg a toiler, who became a man of princely wealth. He scattered benefactions on every side. He was widely esteemed for his spirit of service to God and to man. He enjoyed the honor, the admiration, and the affection of a large number of his fellow-citizens of his own city and his own State. He could look down the ages and see men rising to bless his beneficence. His name will be held in grateful esteem for generations. Another of the same name has come on to the historic arena. He would have enjoyed without any preconditioning effort to make the proper contribution to the sum of good available for man. Not working, he became the prey of many evils, physical and mental and moral. One flees from a description of his life, either prior to his act of manslaughter and consequent imprisonment, or since. How mean the enjoyment of this prodigal parasite as compared with that of the noble toiler of the same name. The poorest provident laborer, who, his day's work done, lies down with a clean conscience to refreshing sleep, expecting to toil every working day in the year, is happier than such an idler who, working not, would yet enjoy.

If we pass from the application of the principle of the text to individuals or mere small classes of individuals, we may note that the God of providence applies it very visibly in dealing with tribes, peoples and nations. The tribes, peoples, and nations who have worked little, have had little to enjoy. The average African tribe may have plenty to eat in the seasons when the voluntary output of nature's fruits are ripe, but the starving periods follow. The toiling peoples and nations are the peoples who have to enjoy. The God of providence, who is the God of revelation, applies the principle of the text in dealing with them. Wherefore, we may rightfully conclude that it may well be a principle of the revealed will of God.

That if a man will not work neither shall he enjoy, is a principle of the revealed will of God, we argue from the consideration:

3rd. That the principle has its parallel in the spiritual history of men.

It has been found that the exercise of the Christian graces is necessary in order to their enjoyment. The great saints, the saints who have felt most fully the preciousness of God's grace unto them, have been, generally, and perhaps always, in spirit, great workers. Men like Augustine, and Martin Luther, and John Calvin, and Richard Baxter, and John Wesley and Whitefield, and Moody. Women like Eliza Agnew, and Isabella Thoburn and Frances Ridley Havergal, and Miss Helen Kirkland and others of our workers at home and abroad.

Those who as Christians work not, enjoy not Christian graces. Go through our churches, church by church. You can not fail to see this. Our churches are full of Christians, in name, that work not. They, many of them, wonder whether they are Christians, they have so little Christian comfort. The world wonders, too, sometimes, whether they are Christians. Some of them are Christians; as on occasion of new providences they awake to activity and find their hearts filled with peace that flows like a river, and joy that the world can not give. But those who labor as Christians are doubly blessed. Their toil is a giving or results in power to give, to be subsequently exercised. And there is no joy like the joy of the true giver. The

very act of genuine Christian giving is God-like; it expands the giver's heart, it sends back to him the approval of all the good, it ennobles his environment, giving more therein to enjoy, it occasions the enlarged blessing of God, and enlarges his capacity for receiving that blessing.

The spiritual experiences of Christians, then, teach that if any man will not work, he shall not enjoy; they show that God applies the principle of the text in the spiritual sphere.

That if a man is unwilling to work, neither shall he enjoy, is a principle of the revealed will of God, we argue, again, from:

4th. *The character of God and man's relation to Him as the subject of creation, providence and redemption.*

God works infinitely. His eye ever sees, not only all real, but all possible objects. His ear ever hears, not only all melodies and harmonies and all disharmonies, but all possible harmonies and disharmonies. His mind knows not only all real objects of knowledge, but all possible objects of knowledge. His will exists in causal relations to all real beings, and as to all merely possible beings maintains a constant negative. Did God not work, He would be a dry, a dead fountain. Our God must work in thought processes, in processes of affection and choice and will. He chooses to work, in part, on, and in behalf of, objects without him. To have such objects, He created them,—this wonderful universe, these millions of worlds in one of which we live. He upholds it. He governs it in a universal and particular providence. He has devised a system of redemption for a portion of His creatures which had fallen into a lost and ruined condition. He has discovered a Redeemer for them. He has wrought out redemption through this Redeemer. He has applied the redemption wrought to a great multitude that no man can number. He is building up out of the redeemed a glorious body for Himself. God worketh, of His nature and of His choice. He getteth joy of working.

He made man in His own image, with capacities for coming to know, capacities of feeling, willing and doing. As God works, so must man. As God finds happiness in working, so must man.

Moreover, God put this creature whom He had made in His own image deeply into His debt, by creating him thus, and by His providence general and special towards him. Man owes to God the service of his every breath. As surely as God is good, so surely it follows that He must demand of the being endowed as man is, that he work. Accordingly, He enjoined work upon the original pair in their estate of innocence.

By the out-working of the scheme of redemption in which, at length, the resources of the Godhead seemed to have been taxed, God would appear to have been obliged still further to expect of man that he should work. He could not have redeemed a being dowered as man is without conditioning his well-being on his working, too. It would not have been right. Man should have it in his heart to say, "My Father worketh hitherto, and *I work*." Such was the voice of the perfect Man; and his voice shows what the voice of all men should be. Thus, in the character of God, which inevitably moves Him to condition the well-being of creatures endowed as men are and related to Him as the subjects of His creative, providential and redemptive work, on their serving Him, there is the most solid support for the teaching of our text. His revealed will on the subject could not be other than the text presents.

That it is a principle of God's revealed will, that if a man would not work, neither shall he enjoy, we argue from

5th. *The chief end of man.*

It is a matter of revelation that the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. The writer of the Proverbs saith (16:4): "The Lord hath made all things for Himself." Hence it ought to be man's chief desire to live for Him. Says the apostle (1 Cor. 6:19,20): "Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." Certainly to glorify God should be the chief part of a man's purpose, according to the Scriptures. It is no less certain that next to glorifying God we should aim to enjoy Him. We should say with the Psalmist (73:25,26): "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart

and my portion forever." With the Psalmist, again, (116:7) we should say, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee."

The highest modern philosophy is at one with the revealed teaching concerning man's chief end. Emmanuel Kant taught that man has a twofold end—happiness and duty, duty being paramount (and implying an infinite obliger).

Now, work being necessary to man's protection against the most degrading evils, necessary to his bodily, mental, moral and spiritual well-being, as has already appeared, if he is to attain his duplex end of glorifying God and enjoying Him, he must work. If we are to enjoy Him we must do it by making Him our everlasting portion in the relations of our Lord absolute; receive His bounties, but do His bidding, rejoice in His protection, but keep His commandments; adore His holiness, but walk in His law. *But* there is no such thing as accepting God in this way, no such thing as keeping His commandments, except by working. This law bids us to serve Him, to serve Him by serving His creatures. The strenuous life of our Lord shows how God's law is to be kept. The life of the great Apostle to the Gentiles shows it in a measure. In Christ, and through Christ's strength, he sets an example to be followed by us in so far as it was Christ-like.

Now, man's chief end being as described, and working, on man's part, being necessary in order to the attainment of his end, and God Himself having defined man's chief end, it must be a part of His revealed will that if a man will not work neither shall he enjoy.

Work is thus not made the end of life; as with some ethical writers in whom the Christian faith has given away. We say not, with Thomas Carlyle: "It is after all the one unhappiness of a man, that he can not work; that he can not get his destiny as a man fulfilled. Behold, the day is passing swiftly over, our life is passing swiftly over; and the night cometh wherein no man can work. The night, once come, our happiness, our unhappiness—it is all abolished, clean gone; a thing that has been." The noble scorn of idleness in these words wakes to vibration the chords of manhood. But they are not quite sane

words. Work is not the end, but a means to the end of man. Such is the teaching of the revealed word, carrying with it the implication of the truth of our text.

That it is a principle of God's revealed word that if a man will not work neither shall he enjoy, we argue from the fact,

6th. *That other Scriptures teach it clearly.*

On the heels of the fall of the original pair, God wrapped a blessing in the curse, and said, according to Genesis 3:19, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the ground; for out of it thou wast taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." In, or by, the sweat of thy face only shalt thou eat bread. Such is the meaning of the passage in its setting. Such is the revealed will of God. And such is the teaching of our text.

Speaking by the mouth of the wise man, God says (Proverbs 13:4): "The soul of the sluggard desireth and hath nothing, but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat." Again, by the same mouthpiece, He saith: "The sluggard will not plough by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest and have nothing." And again (Proverbs 24:30-34): "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 was broken down. Then I saw and considered it well. I looked upon it and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep. So shall thy poverty come as one that travaileth, and thy want as an armed man." Such is the divine philosophy on what goes on about us—on the connection between want of industry and nothing to enjoy; and such is the divine disclosure of the divine will touching the conditions of man's enjoying. God declares in the clause immediately preceding the words just quoted that he will render to every man according to his works; that, if a man sleep away supinely his days, dire poverty shall be sent upon him. It is not only discovered by the divine insight into the phenomena around us to be the principle upon which God moves in His providential dealings with man, it is declared to be His fixed plan to act upon this principle.

Thus the teaching of the texts is taught widely in Scripture.

In conclusion, let us notice that the revelation of this principle as a part of God's will leaves no place for a leisure class in society—no place for a gentleman of leisure, nor for a lady of leisure. People who claim the right of leisure, and use it, are a burden to the world. God's word leaves no right of enjoying to a man or a woman who is unwilling to do something useful—unwilling to aid in production, or distribution, or education, or improvement in morals, or in spiritual life; no place for one who is unwilling to make a proper contribution to the sum total of good things available for man. It gives to any man the right of enjoying only in proportion as he exercises the spirit of willingness to make his fair contribution. Even the aged should remember that they can never get too told to be willing to work according to their capabilities. The young should be taught with their budding powers that, whatever the life to which they look forward, to be right and not to result in dismal failure, it must include the willingness to work. The men of wealth, tempted to lead lives of leisure, must be taught that there are special obligations on them to give themselves to particular forms of labor which to others may seem peculiarly disinterested. Women living as female drones, or wasps, should awake to the mean poverty of their lives, even though passed in gilded palaces.

There is some want of clearness of view as to what a parasite is. We all recognize certain persons as parasites. We need not describe them. But, are there not others fairly entitled to the name? What is the person of means who is unwilling to work but a parasite from the points of view of God, absorbing a livelihood from His bounty without effort or desire to do anything for the welfare of God's creatures in return?

In condemning the lazy, lounging, sponging parasites of Thessalonica, he gives a lesson sorely needed to-day, and in our own country, where the vast increase of wealth is calling into existence the so-called leisure classes, and proving to be the occasion of the growth of indolent and parasitical hangers-on of the body social. But the lesson is always and everywhere

needed, for the tendency to run into unwillingness to work is ever with us, as Christ said of the poor.

But, my brethren in the ministry, or looking toward it, we ought to make a closer application of this text to ourselves. Not long ago a distinguished Scotch theologian charged upon the ministers of Scotland that they were not working as they should. The charge is not infrequently made against individual ministers in our own country. Not long ago, in a notice of a heart-to-heart talk, given by one minister to other ministers of one of our great cities, one of the first temptations of the minister mentioned was that to idleness. Some of the ministers charged with idleness may be done grave injustice in the charge. But there is probably no small ground for the charge as made against others. I heard a distinguished minister of our own body charged less than six weeks ago with busy trifling, failure to work, and the charge in this case was made by a friend, and in a tone of sadness unfeigned. It is painful to think that any amongst us should be idle, lounging, sponging parasites.

Social visiting has its place in the pastor's life, when regulated by the proper purpose. Some men fail to do enough of it. But it is feared that some ministers abuse the right and privilege of social visiting; that they thus turn into lounging, sponging parasites. The minister should remember that, if he work not to make his proper contributions to man's good, he should not enjoy. The true minister is worthy to enjoy. He ought in some circumstances to stand up and to say to his people: You should give your pastor more, that he may meet all just obligations aright. But, as he ought to have, if he be willing to work, the wherewithal to do for himself and others as his Christian brethren about him ought to do for themselves and others about them, so he ought not *have*, if he be unwilling to work as he ought in his place. The obligation on all men to work, if it be possible, is imperative; but greater evil follows on the idle courses of one man than on that of others. Ministers are peculiarly ensamples to the flock. Hence a fault of the minister is peculiarly harmful. Ministers should be the men of the most balanced and approvable industry therefore.

The seminarian looking to the ministry should cultivate the habit of work. Not that he should work always; the bow is a better instrument for periods of relaxation. But we should study to reach such a proportion between working hours and those of rest and relaxation that our greatest total of efficiency as workers may be attained. Is this not true? And should we not all strive so to work as to feel that we eat no man's meat for naught? Should we not all strive so to live in all the future as to have the right to feel that we are worth all we cost the church and the community, twice over, thrice over, and more? Shall we not make a hearty and steadfast endeavor to work so as to please that great and gracious being who inspired His servant to write the command that if a man would not work, neither should he eat?