

Like Vinegar to Teeth, Smoke to Eyes

Proverbs 10:26

Charlie Brackett

Life can be filled with annoyances, especially to the one who is sensitive to such things. Some annoyances are best overlooked, but others are too poignant to be ignored. Two such insistent irritants are used in Proverbs 10:26 to illustrate the lesson which Solomon has for us today. Give attention please.

Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes,
So is the lazy one to those who send him.

Have you ever had your teeth set on edge? The experience is more than just a sharp, bitter or biting taste. It is that bitterness that not only repulses the taste buds but sends a chill down your spine and, as the saying goes, sets your teeth on edge. In describing treatment inflicted by his adversaries, David said in Psalm 69:21, "They gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." For most of us, vinegar is not to be taken in any quantity. The thought is unpleasant, even repulsive. The thought itself almost sets teeth on edge.

Can you imagine anything more delightful, more welcome on a cold starry night in the woods than the warmth of a brightly dancing campfire? As you pull yourself close and occasionally turn to warm all sides, your delight may be abruptly snuffed out by a wisp of smoke in your eyes at the shifting of the wind. Being downwind at fireside is no fun. Blinded, eyes irritated and smarting, you move. It's not the kind of annoyance that drives you completely away, but you don't like it, in fact, you can't stand it for long before you have to act to remove the irritation.

Solomon said these are the way of a lazy person to the ones who send him. Vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes. The lazy person is an irritant, a poignant annoyance to his employers. He is worse than useless. They send him expecting he will complete his task responsibly and, when he doesn't, plans are disrupted, time is wasted and hopes are dashed. Shakespeare said, "How sour sweet music is When time is broke and no proportion kept! So it is, in the music of men's lives."

The Bible speaks sharply and often against idleness and sluggishness. Laziness is clearly condemned. It is a sin and, if there are degrees of sin, it is the parent of worse. None of us want to be lazy in our duties toward men, but far worse it is to be lazy in our duty toward God. Are you busy in the kingdom? Is there a duty you have left undone? A command to act that you have disobeyed? I don't know about you, but I don't want to be like vinegar to God's teeth and smoke to God's eyes!