

AM Ruth 2 & Proverbs 21:25-26

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Date: 26 October 2025

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[0:00] Chapter 2. Ruth chapter 2 in the church bibles it's on page 268. Ruth chapter 2. Ruth chapter 2 and let us read together God's word.

Here we pick up Naomi and her family had left Bethlehem during a famine to go to the land of Moab and then after Naomi's husband has died and her two sons have died she returns with one of her daughters-in-law Ruth.

And we pick up in chapter 2 after Naomi and Ruth have returned. So Ruth chapter 2 then from verse 1. Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech whose name was Boaz.

And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favour. And she said to her go my daughter. So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz who was of the clan of Elimelech.

And behold Boaz came from Bethlehem and he said to the reapers the Lord be with you. And they answered the Lord bless you. Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers whose young woman is this?

[1:45] And the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered she is the young Moabite woman who came back when Naomi from the country of Moab. She said please let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers.

So she came and she has continued from early morning until now except for a short rest. Then Boaz said to Ruth now listen my daughter do not go to glean in another field or leave this one. But keep close to my young women. Let your eyes be on the fields that they are reaping and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you?

And when you are thirsty go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn. Then she fell on her face bowing to the ground and said to him. Why have I found favor in your eyes that you should take notice of me since I am a foreigner?

But Boaz answered her. All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me. And how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before.

[2:57] The Lord repay you for what you have done. And a full reward be given you by the Lord the God of Israel under whose wings you have come to take refuge.

Then she said I have found favor in your eyes my Lord for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant though I am not one of your servants.

And at mealtime Boaz said to her come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine. So she sat beside the reapers and he passed to her roasted grain and she ate until she was satisfied and she had some left over.

And when she rose to glean Boaz instructed his young men saying let her glean even among the sheaves and do not reproach her. And also pull out some from the bundles for her and leave it for her to glean and do not rebuke her.

So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned and it was about an ephah of barley. And she took it up and went into the city.

[4:03] Her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also brought out and gave her what food she had left over after being satisfied. And her mother-in-law said to her where did you glean today and where have you

worked?

Blessed be the man who took notice of you. So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said this man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz. And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law may he be blessed by the Lord whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead.

Naomi also said to her the man is a close relative of ours one of our redeemers. And Ruth the Moabite said besides he said to me you shall keep close by my young men until they have finished all my harvest.

And Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law it is good my daughter that you go out with his young women lest in another field you be assaulted.

So she kept close to the young women of Boaz gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests. And she lived with her mother-in-law. Amen.

[5:11] Please turn with me in the scriptures to the book of Proverbs this time.

And we're just going to read two verses from Proverbs 21. Proverbs 21 and we're going to read together verses 25 and 26.

Proverbs 21 and verse 25. The desire of the sluggard kills him for his hands refuse to labour. All day long he craves and craves. But the righteous gives and does not hold back. Let's just bow our heads just a moment again before we come to God's word now.

Lord we do thank you as we've sung that you are the changeless, immortal, everlasting God. Lord we would come to the word provided to us by that God now this morning.

[6:19] Lord we pray that we would receive it as such. That we would receive it as the very word of God. Lord we pray that you would be with us by your Holy Spirit. That your word would be applied to us.

That we would be transformed by it. That our minds would be renewed by it. Lord we pray that you would be pleased to speak to us.

May each of us know that we have encountered the living and true God here this morning. In his word. Be with us then we pray. Amen.

Solomon in Ecclesiastes says that of the making of many books there is no end. And that has perhaps never been more true than in our own day.

Except it's not limited to books anymore. Endless people put forward yes books. But articles, blogs, podcasts, television programs.

[7:20] All setting forward how we ought to live. What the good life is. And we could be forgiven when we are faced with so many options.

For concluding that in fact it's impossible to know how we ought to live. But the book of Proverbs consistently presents life on the contrary as a choice between two ways.

Proverbs 9.10 says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. In other words the right way to live, the way of wisdom, is the way which is rooted in the fear of the Lord.

All other ways are ultimately ways of folly. And Proverbs presents this in part through a series of characters.

Different types of fool. The fool being the one who rejects the fear of the Lord and God's way. And we're going to encounter in this proverb we're looking at this morning.

[8:33] A particular type of fool. The sluggard. The type of fool who is lazy. Idle. And we're going to look at this proverb here this morning under three headings.

Three headings all beginning with the letter F. Fatal, fruitless and flourishing. The first two related to the way of the sluggard. Fatal and fruitless.

And then the final being the contrast to that. The third point. The way of the righteous which is flourishing. But first of all then.

Fatal. The way of the sluggard is fatal. Now for most people. Desires drive us. At least in some way. At the most basic level. If people want to eat. If they want to have a house. These things require money. Or perhaps in a different culture. The hard work of cultivating the land and so on.

[9:37] And so people are driven to work. And this occurs at the most basic level of self-preservation. We work to feed ourselves.

But then we can also increase our work. Perhaps because we have additional responsibilities. Maybe you've gone for a promotion in work. Because you've had children or something like that. Now as anything can. This can be perverted. I've watched on occasion. The television program. The Apprentice. And I don't know if you've ever seen that. But it's quite distasteful sometimes. How the contestants in that program. Can vaunt their open lust. After wealth and money.

But for good or evil. Desire drives them. And indeed most of us. To work. But this proverb here this morning.

[10:41] Talks about another desire. Verse 25 there. The desire of the sluggard. Kills him. The desire of the sluggard.

The lazy person. Is different. Rather than driving him to labor. For what he desires. For food. Shelter.

And so on. His desire is rather. For idleness. Itself. And in itself. Left unchecked. That desire will kill him.

That's what this proverb. Says here. The desire of the sluggard. Kills him. For his hands. Refuse to labor. As our text says. Now I think that there is more.

To this proverb. Than simply. An economic reality. And we'll go on to see that. As we go through it. But that is true. Isn't it? That's an economic truth.

[11:40] Laziness. As a trait. Given sort of free reign. Leads to death. Proverbs 19.24. Says the sluggard. Buries his hand in the dish. And he will not even bring it.

To his mouth. Now most desire for idleness. Of course. Is not taken to that extreme. But this proverb. Is taking.

Idleness. Laziness. To its logical conclusion. The way of the sluggard. Is ultimately a way. Which is. At heart.

Antithetical. To life. It's entirely contrary. To. Life. And rather promotes. Death. And that's particularly. Poetically.

In Proverbs 24. And I. I'll just read. That to you now. Proverbs 24. Verse. From verse 30. This is what Solomon says.

[12:36] I passed by the field. Of a sluggard. By the vineyard. Of a man lacking sense. And behold. It was all overgrown. With thorns. The ground was covered.

With nettles. And its stone wall. Was broken down. Then I saw. And considered. It. I looked. And received instruction. A little sleep.

A little slumber. A little folding. Of the hands to rest. And poverty. Will come upon you. Like a robber. And want. Like an armed man. And this would have been.

Particularly. Starkly the case. In Solomon's day. Solomon. The king of Israel. And the author. Of most of the book. Of Proverbs. And under the law. Of Moses.

There was provision. For the poor. And in the case. Of widows and orphans. Or perhaps. We might think. Those who. Who could not. Were unable. To go out and work.

[13:30] There was. Financial provision. But certainly. For the able-bodied. You either. Cultivated your own land. Which would have been the norm. Or if you were in poverty.

For some reason. You would have to. Undergo the hard work. Of gleaning. Now gleaning. We read about it. Actually. In Ruth. A moment ago. But the law of Moses.

Required landowners. Not to reap. To the edges of their fields. And it also required. That if. As you were gathering up. Drain. You dropped some of it.

You weren't allowed to pick it up. The edges of the fields. The corners. Sorry. And any drain. That you dropped. As you were gathering it up. Was to be left there. For the poor.

But if people. Wanted to avail themselves. Of this. Grain that had been left there. It involved the. The hard work. Of going out. And gathering it up.

[14:24] And we find Ruth doing that. In that. Chapter we read a bit earlier. And it's clear. That it was hard work. You can imagine it. Out there. In the baking sun. Picking up. Maybe for relatively little reward.

Bits of Grain. That had been dropped. Or left. Now our own society. Works in a. In a somewhat different way. And there probably is. Greater scope.
For someone who's. Genuinely lazy. To survive. And to still eat. In a way which was different. Than Solomon's day. But that doesn't mean.
That this proverb. Has become outdated. The way of the sluggard. Is still. A way. Is still a path. Which tends towards. Death. And stagnation.
Rather than to life. And flourishing. In a way of the sluggard. Leads to poverty. That passage. We read a moment ago. In. Proverbs 24.
[15:18] Says that. Doesn't it. It says that poverty. Will come upon you. Like a robber. And want. Like an armed man. And our own. Common sense. Testifies to that. As well.

Doesn't it. Even today. Poverty. In general terms. Does lead. To worse health outcomes. Earlier death. And so on. Now. And I want to underline this.
And this is really important. So. Make sure you hear this. Just in case I misunderstood. Or misquoted later. I am not. Emphatically not.
Equating. Poverty. With laziness. If we look in the Bible. Ruth. As we read earlier on. She was poor. When she came back. To Bethlehem. From Moab. With Naomi. But she was certainly not. Lazy. And I am particularly conscious.

[16:12] In our modern economy. The whole way that it's based. On two incomes. And so on. Of how it can be very difficult. Sometimes. For people. To make ends meet.

So I'm not equating at all. Poverty. With laziness. But what I am saying. And what the book of Proverbs is saying. Is that the way of the sluggard.
Is a way. That leads. To poverty. It's a way. It's not the only way. But it's a way. Which leads in fact. Ultimately.

To death. But I want to say something else as well. To clarify the scope. Of what we're talking about. Before we go on. In our next points. To maybe get into a bit more detail here. Now this proverb is not.

It's not merely addressing. Someone's work situation. Now remember that Solomon is saying this. In a more agrarian economy than ours.

[17:11] Where the aim of most people. Was essentially a sort of economic self-sufficiency. Based on their cultivating of their own land. We see that. In that passage we read a moment ago. In Proverbs 24.

Don't we? What does Solomon see as he passes by? He sees the field of the sluggard. He sees the vineyard of the man lacking sense. The sluggard ultimately is not somebody who isn't employed. But he's someone who desires to be idle. And so does not do what he or she ought to do. And that's going to look different for different people.

For some it will manifest in trying to avoid paid employment. But it can also be someone who's simply too lazy to do a good job when employed.

Proverbs 10.26 says. Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes. So is the sluggard to those who send him. In other words. Trying to get a lazy person to do something is just more trouble than it's worth.

[18:17] The sluggard is unemployable. It can also mean someone who just finds any excuse to avoid doing what needs to be done. Proverbs 26.13 says.

The sluggard says. There is a lion in the road. The idea being that the sluggard uses any improbable excuse to avoid going out and doing what needs to be done.

The spirit of the sluggard then is found in any neglect of our duties. Whether that's in or outside the home. And it also shows.

Lest anyone should imagine I'm saying this. That someone who's too ill or disabled to be. For example in paid employment. Ought not to be thought of for that reason.

As being a sluggard. And for one thing of course this can only be measured against what a person ought to do. And if a person cannot work. Then a person cannot be said to be ought to be doing that.

[19:17] But secondly. Even a person who's entirely bed bound. Does not need to be therefore unproductive. I remember the retired minister of the church in which I grew up.

He was actually already retired when we. When as a child my family joined that church. But he retired because he developed multiple sclerosis MS.

But despite being housebound for years. In fact most of my adult life. I say most of my life in fact. Even as a child. He was enormously productive by writing.

A great example in fact of productivity. Even in difficult circumstances. Now of course a writing ministry is not going to be the case. For everyone.

But the principle is. Whatever your hand finds to do. Do it with all your might. And he was a great example of how we can find things to do. And be fruitful. Even when maybe.

[20:18] The Chancellor of the Exchequer may think that we are entirely unproductive. So the Lord can find things for us to do. But the neglect of this principle.

Which is the way of the sluggard. Leads to death. Quite literally at the extreme. A man who refuses any labour by the brute forces of nature. Will not eat.

Unless someone provides for him. Well. That's the first point. The way of the sluggard is fatal. But secondly. It is also fruitless. And this proverb makes it clear.

That this is more. Than a mere economic reality. Solomon is not just saying. You know. Look. You'll be better off.

If you're not lazy. Now he is saying that. But that's not all that he's saying. He's not just giving the kind of the message. That Rachel Reeves wants us to hear. That we need to be economically active.

[21:17] And productive. Rather it's clear. That the attitude of the sluggard. Hits. At the very heart. Of life. Look at verse 26. All day long.

He craves and craves. But the righteous gives. And does not hold back. Now there are a couple of things here. Two things I think.

Which take this beyond mere economic commentary. Firstly. Firstly. We see this in verse 26 here. The sluggard. Is contrasted with. The righteous.

Solomon does not. As he does in some other places. Contrast here. The sluggard. With the diligent. No. He is contrasted with. The righteous. The sluggard is therefore.

Being put in the category. Of the wicked. Now that's implicit anyway. In the book of Proverbs. There are only two ways. The way of wisdom. And the way of folly. And the sluggard. Is certainly.

[22:16] The fool. And the fool. Is one who is wicked. But it's made explicit here. The way of the sluggard. As described here. Is not.

Morally neutral. It is not simply. An economically. Unwise thing. Rather it is in fact. Morally wicked. The right. To one who is righteous. Is not a sluggard. That's what Solomon is saying here. And this underlines. What we've already said. About. The way of the sluggard. Being fatal.

Leading to death. But it. Expands it. The fact is. That God did not create. Men and women. For idleness. Right from creation.

God. Put Adam. Into the garden. To work. Didn't he? He put it. Put it. Put him in the garden. To dress it. And keep it. And he. Gave him the commission. To fill the earth. And to subdue it.

[23:12] But the sluggard. Has no time for this. Far from subduing the earth. Far from having an impact. On the world. And reaching outward. And looking outward. He allows his household.

To fall into decay. He allows his. Areas of responsibility. To fall into ruin. Simply because he cannot. Be bothered.

And this produces. Yes. Economic ruin. But it also produces. Spiritual ruin. And it further defaces. The image of God.

In man. And produces. Societal ruin. As well. And just bear this in mind. You know. It's possible. As we went through. Our first point. That you thought to yourself. That's an interesting point.

Laziness probably doesn't pay. And maybe you even vowed. To book up your ideas. A little bit. And that's all good. But see here. That the sluggard.

[24:13] Is not simply one. Who is. Economically. Not going to do as well. As the one who. Works hard. But he is one. Who has rejected. God's way of life.

For another way. Let me ask you this morning. Are you rejecting. Your God given duties. Remember again. Lest we get confused here.

This is not talking about. Whether you are. Sort of out. Nine till five. Monday to Friday. In an office somewhere. Or whatever your work. Pattern is. You can be employed.

You can be. And lazy. You can be. Unemployed. And fruitful. And productive. We've already said that. But where are you? Are the areas.

Over which God. Has given you. Responsibility. Falling into decay. Or are you being. Fruitful. Or maybe you're just.

[25:10] Avoiding responsibility. Altogether. That's another form. Of idleness. And I said there were two things. Under this heading. That I wanted to see.

So look now. At the first part. Of verse 26. As well. All day long. We read there. He craves. And craves. This is the sluggard here. Literally. All day.

He desires. Desire. Here. The desire. Spoken of. Is probably. The more conventional. Things that people desire. Food. Shelter.

Perhaps wealth. And so on. The desire. That he has. For idleness. Does not stop him. Wanting other things. He just won't work. For them. Like all inordinate desires.

Sloth. Is not fulfilling. He can never be free. From the need for labor. So he can never rest. In his idleness. And when he is idle.

[26:08] His idleness. Results in the loss. Of the necessities of life. Which makes him. Desire them as well. And so he ends up. As Solomon says here. Consumed.

With desire. Consumed. With coveting. And his idleness. In fact. Means in a sense. He has nothing else to do. All day.

Than to be consumed. With desire. As that well known. Non-scriptural proverb. Puts it. The devil. Makes work. For idle hands. In this case. Coveting. And this idleness.

Consumed. With desire. Is inherently. Rather than being fruitful. Is inherently. Selfish. It desires. To receive. From the labors. Of others. Without giving. Anything. And that may actually be. The significance. Of the form. In the Hebrew.

[27:05] Of the verb here. That's translated. As craves. It's a form. Which usually means. To do something. To yourself. But can also mean. To do something. For yourself.

Here. He is desiring. And craving. For himself. In contrast. To the righteous. We read of. In the next part of the verse. Who is looking outward.

And what he can do. For others. And where are you on this? Is your attitude. Is your approach to life. A selfish desire. To give away.

To give away. And to get away. With as little as possible. To live. Selfishly. And fruitlessly. That way. Inclines to death.

And not just for yourself. But in fact. To everything. That you touch. If the whole world. Acted like you. Perhaps. The world. Would descend.

[28:03] Into misery. Squalor. And death. Well you see. The inherent fruitlessness. Of this approach. Of any approach. Which. Seeks not to contribute anything.

Even for yourself. And only. To receive. The point is. That God made us. As we've already said. To be fruitful. And productive. And that's not just economically. Or culturally. Though that's included. But to have. Good works. Which overflow. Looking for others. Looking to the good of others. And the neglect of this. The Bible says. Is wickedness.

About. About four years ago. I planted an apple tree. In our garden. And for the first couple of years. We had. We had fruit on that tree. We had apples. But for the past two years.

We've had. Nothing. And this year. Just gone. Not even blossom. That tree has. For two years. Been fruitless. Now. There may be reasons for that.

[28:59] And maybe. There's something I can do. To. To fix that. To remedy that. But if it continues to be fruitless. And nothing will fix it. What should I do? Well if I've planted it.

So I can get apples from it. Then I should cut it down. Shouldn't I? Plant another one. Which will bear fruit. And God has made us. To bring forth fruit.

To look outward from ourselves. Selflessly. In fact. Jesus uses this. And it's used throughout the New Testament. Actually. This idea of. Being fruitful. Of being like a tree.

Which brings forth. Fruit. Good works. Jesus' answer. To the fruitless tree. Is that he will. Cut it down. In judgment.

If you realize. The seriousness of this. Now of course. On one level. The extreme. Presented here. In Proverbs. Is. Is a caricature. And that's deliberate. But it's deliberate.

[29:58] So that we can see. The outworking. Of where this way leads. But don't allow. The caricature. Element of it. To allow yourself. To distance yourself.

From this. Be challenged. By this. Are you seeking. To glorify God. By subduing the earth. By bringing forth. Fruits of righteousness. In whatever you've been called to do.

Or have you lost. That perspective. And maybe your only goal. Is the next drink. The next. Sitting down in front of the television.

And. Binging that. Series you've been watching. Or whatever it is. For you. Well we've had our first two points. Fatal. And fruitless.

The way of the sluggard. But now. Thirdly and finally. The way of the righteous. Flourishing. This proverb. Having devoted. Three lines. To the way of the sluggard.

[30:53] Concludes. By contrasting. The way of the sluggard. With the way. Of the righteous. Look at verse. 26. Right at the end there. The second part of it.

But the righteous. Gives. And does not. Hold back. Look. And there are a couple of things. To be said here. The first is that here.

We have again. A basic. Economic. Reality. The one who is diligent. The one who works hard. And well. Is more likely to be in a position.

To be able to give. Generously. And again. We are speaking in generalities here. But it is certainly more true. Than it is. For the sluggard. We read at the end of verse 26.

That he gives. And he does not hold back. And part of the reason for that. Is that he can do so. He is free to be generous. Because of the fruit. Of his labours. And that is something. We ought to all.

[31:49] Aim for. However. As we have said. This is about more. Than economics. This is about. Two attitudes. Of heart. The sluggard.

Only wants to take. He has no category. Forgiving. But the one who is righteous. Is different. His generosity. Overflows.

And that is important to note. That this is not automatically true. Of everyone. Who is. Not a sluggard. We need to note. We spoke earlier.

Didn't we. About people who are. Hardworking. But also. Covetous. There are people who are. They are not sluggards. But they are also not righteous. They are greedy.

But the one who is righteous. Does not work hard. Because he is greedy. He desires to provide for himself. And others. And so.

[32:47] When in a position to do so. He does not hold back. He gives. Unsparingly. If you would walk. The path of wisdom.

The call from this proverb. Is not. Simply. Not to be slothful. But to take what God has given. And to be unsparing with it.

It's in fact the opposite. Of the selfishness. Of the sluggard. It's a call to see the inherent fruitfulness. Of God's call at creation.

To subdue the earth. To be fruitful. To multiply. Yes. In population terms. But in every way. To be like God. Who in pure gratuitous love. And overflowing grace.

Decided to create something outside of himself. And to share himself with it. The image of God. And that's what men and women are. Is not.

[33:44] Self absorbed. It is not. Inward looking. And this is seen supremely. Of course. In the Lord Jesus Christ. Isn't it? God has a

right.

To require this of you. This overflowing generosity. Because all that you have. Is a gift. You're a steward of creation. You're not its maker. For all of our work.

And diligence. All that we can ever amass. In this world. Is a gift. But the divine son of God. The second person of the Holy Trinity.

He was in the form of God. It was inherently his to be God. He was not a mere steward. Of what he had made. But he was very God.

A very God. He was that great. Word of God. By which God made the worlds. But yet. He who was rich.

[34:41] For our sake. For your sake. Became poor. Became man. Became a helpless baby. In Bethlehem. He made himself of no reputation.

And took upon himself. The form of a servant. That great untreated one. Became one who was. Had a body which had been made.

That one who could not by nature suffer. Came into this world. And suffered. Indeed. If you're a Christian here. This morning. He gave his very life for you.

And he gave it freely. We just read this proverb again here. Verse 25 there.

The desire of the sluggard kills him. For his hands refuse to labour. All day long he craves and craves. But the righteous gives. And does not hold back. Now there's a question. Which is unanswered here.

[35:38] Isn't there? To whom is the righteous one being generous? To whom is he giving of his bounty? Because of the contrast. Between the sluggard and the righteous. We most naturally perhaps assume.

That he's giving to the poor generally. Rather than specifically to the sluggard. However the wording of the proverb itself. Leaves open the possibility. That the righteous one is in fact being open handed to the sluggard also.

But it's only a possibility. But when we come to Christ. The true fulfilment of what the righteous one is. There is no ambiguity.

No. God demonstrates his love toward us. In that while we were yet sinners. Christ died for us. His overabounding love. Which has no necessity to it.

Because he isn't a steward of creation. He's the maker of it. But his overabounding love was given without stinting. With no requirement for it.

[36:40] And it was given for the ungodly. It was given even for the sluggard. Indeed for you if you've trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you've never come to avail yourself of this blessing here.

And you're here this morning. Will you come? Even now. Maybe you are an unfruitful tree. Maybe you are ready to be cut down. And cast into eternal fire on the day of judgment.

The truth is by nature all of us are. Whether we're particularly characterized by this fault of the sluggard. Or by others. But there is mercy.

If you will turn from sin to the Lord Jesus Christ. To trust in his death on the cross for sins. Then you can be saved. And Christ by his spirit will work in you to bring forth fruit.

Even in this life. And then perfectly in the age to come. Don't be put off by this. It's possible to be a spiritual sluggard.

[37:41] To be always putting it off. To know that you ought to do it. But to think I'll do it a bit later. Don't do that. You could die on the way home. You could step out of here and be run over by a car that comes off the road.

Flying into the church doors. Or will you fall down on your knees before the Lord. And lay down your whole life as a living sacrifice to him. Will you trust in his death on the cross for sins.

And will you through the spirit working in you. Bring forth fruits of righteousness. And if you are a Christian here this morning.

Will you understand that in this calling that God is giving to us. To overflowing generosity. That we are not being asked to do something beyond what Christ has done.

When God. We've already said. The second person of the Trinity. With no requirement upon him. Because he was the maker of all things.

