

## John 5:19,17

*John 5:17 “My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I too am working . . . Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by Himself; He can do only what He sees His Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.” (NIV)*

The Jewish rabbis of Jesus’ day taught (rightly) that God was exempted from resting on the Sabbath. They knew that God upheld His creation every day; otherwise it would collapse. They knew that God gave life to infants who were born on the Sabbath, and that He executed judgment for those who died on the Sabbath. So when Jesus claimed the authority to work on the Sabbath by healing a paralyzed man, and when He claimed to do so because He was God’s Son, He was claiming to be equal with God. That is why the Jewish leaders tried to stone Him for blasphemy (John 5:18).

But look more closely at verse 17 and 19. Even though Jesus claims to be God’s unique Son, He does not initiate the work that He does. It is because His Father is working on the Sabbath that Jesus works. In fact, Jesus says that He can do nothing “by Himself” – from His own initiative. Rather, He sees what His Father is doing, and does it with Him. In other words, Jesus *responded to His Father’s initiative*. For example, Jesus apparently did not simply decide on His own initiative to heal the paralytic. Rather, He somehow perceived that His Father intended to heal the paralytic, and He then actively cooperated with His Father in this redemptive work.

Jesus was God’s unique Son; we are God’s adopted sons and daughters through faith in Jesus. The Father showed Jesus “all the things He is doing” (John 5:20); He shows us only the portion of what



He is doing. But as God's children, we are to live like Jesus – *responding to our Father's initiative*. We do not simply decide to work for God, and then go to work. Rather, we present ourselves to God as His instruments (Romans 6:13) – we ask to see what God is doing that He wants us to do with Him, and then we cooperate with Him in this work.

Some may say, “This sounds like a cop-out, an excuse for laziness.” But remember: our Father is always working. And since He is always working, and since we are His children, He is likely to have daily work for us to do with Him. (This has certainly been my experience). Therefore, if we are spending days and weeks without serving God, it is almost certainly because we are not asking the Father to see what He is doing.

On the other hand, taking possession of God's work and trying to do it by our own initiative is just as unspiritual as being complacent. Abraham and Sarah did this when they fathered Ishmael through Hagar, and God rejected their work (even though He did not reject Ishmael). As Francis Schaeffer used to say, “When we are in the place God has for us, doing the work He has assigned to us, then we will have His power working through us, and He will bear His fruit through us.” But when we become “independent contractors” for God, no matter how industrious we are we will actually accomplish less for God. And we will lose the sense of adventure and satisfaction that comes from seeing what He is doing and doing it with Him.

When I look back on my own Christian life, I can identify periods of both complacency and self-initiative in ministry. But I can also identify many times when I asked God to see what He was doing that He wanted me to do with Him – and then joined Him in His work. Such work has always entailed labor and weariness and spiritual warfare. But it has also entailed God's peace and empowering – and His fruit – because I was in sync with Him. I want the remainder of my time on earth to be characterized by this mind-set.



What do you want for the remainder of your time on earth? Many Christians drift into complacency during their senior years. Sometimes this complacency is a compromise with our culture's view of "retirement" – that this is a time for the self-centered leisure we have earned. Other senior Christians become complacent as a reaction to years of "independent contractor" ministry that has left them exhausted and disillusioned. Let's embrace the alternative of living like Jesus: "I do nothing on my own initiative. I see what my Father is doing, and I do it with Him."

*Father, thank You for making me Your child through the work of Your Son Jesus Christ. Thank You that You are still working every day, and that You invite me today to collaborate with You in Your work. Open my eyes to see what You are doing today that You want me to do with You. Help me to live with this mind-set until the day that I see You face to face.*

