

# The Ease Era

by Dr. Paul Rees

"Moab hath been at ease from his youth" (Jeremiah 48:11).  
"Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease" (Psalm 123: 4).  
"Take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry" (Luke 12:19).  
"Woe to them that are at ease in Zion" (Amos 6: 1).

Here perhaps is a symbol of much that passes for success in our American culture. It has been called "The Ease Era." We rebel against rigor and vigor. We cotton to softness and snugness.

Even a skiing party or a hunting expedition has to be plush. The commercial promoters are well aware of this. In fact, they help to encourage the lounging state of mind. One eastern railroad, in its advertising of ski train excursions, coined the neat and cozy slogan: "Roughing it smoothly."

The Bible's word for it is "ease". It is a drowsy stupor, a languid idleness, a sterile static comfortableness, for which God has no use.

There is, for example, the ease of the stagnant. One day the prophet Jeremiah looked across from the heights of Judah, beyond the Jordan Valley, to the purple hills of Moab. Here was Judah, often careless but also chastened, frequently faithless but likewise frequently punished, ever seeking security, but never wholly free, it seemed, from the threat of invasion.

Yonder, was Moab, off the beaten track of marching armies, somehow removed from the wrack and worry of life's uncertainties, and through it all a nation of cool, calculating, calloused unconcern.

Some observers might have thought Moab's situation far the better, but not Jeremiah. He cried a fateful doom upon the soul of a people gone stale and stagnant: "Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath been settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity." Jeremiah 48: 11.

## Stale and Stagnant.

Churches too, are exposed to this peril of going stagnant and of hugging to their cold hearts the cold comfort of an unchanging tradition. In eighteenth century England when John Wesley, breaking precedent, began preaching in the open air, sinners were brought to conversion but churchmen were brought to consternation. They objected. They said it was not "dignified".

They insisted it was not "regular". They argued that it was "sensational". When Mr. Wesley was refused the privilege of preaching in his own father's church at Epworth, he went out into the church graveyard and preached from a tombstone.

Another form of ease denounced in the Bible is the ease of the scornful. Let us turn to Psalm 123:4. "Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud." Moffatt's translation has a style that crackles: "We have had our fill, and more, of scorn and sneers, from arrogant creatures living at their ease."

It is fatally easy to be a scorner, sitting in the ivory tower of the cynic and throwing spitballs at the crowd below. But it is sweaty, muscle-straining business to get down from that tart height and begin bringing the white searching light and the bright saving love of God into the drab, defeated, devil-ridden lives of these unhappy people.

The poet Heine, in bitter outburst against the crucified Jesus, once exclaimed: "I, too, might have tried to save men if I had not doubted they were worth saving!"

You see, it is easier by a long sea-mile to scoff at the

good in others than to be honest about the evil in ourselves.

The ease of the scorner! The Psalmist said that he and his friends had had their fill of it. What would he say to our twentieth century Christians!

For a third type of lounging which the Bible portrays, we turn to the New Testament. It is the ease of the sensual, and Jesus identified it for us when He gave in the story of the Rich Farmer in Luke 12. When this wealthy Landlord took an inventory of his goods, after a period of expanding his storage facilities and gathering in bumper crops, he said, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry"—verse 19.

## Sensual — Selfish

Here, obviously, is a man who fancies that by satisfying the senses you can make the soul serene. God called him a "Fool." That night he died. He did not run out of money. He ran out of time. Time to do something more than grub in the earth by day and pamper his stomach at night!

Today the United States is the Rich Fool swollen to the size of a nation. Along with the highest average income in the world we have more shiny cars, more purring

refrigerators, more humming vacuum cleaners, more noisy radios, more flickering television sets, more electric blankets, more vocal telephones, more power-generating turbines, more stream-lined trains, more roaring aircraft, than any people who ever turned their eyes toward God's shining sun on any continent in any age of the world's long story.

We should be superbly happy—if only comfort for the soul were the same as comfort for the body. We are not happy. We are not secure. If you want something to reflect on, try this; the same nation that manufactures the world's finest inner spring mattresses and electric blankets has to manufacture even greater quantities of aspirin tablets and sleeping pills to enable its citizens to get some rest.

While we are on the line of "more of this and that," we have to go on to say that we have more divorces, more broken homes, more child delinquency, more nervous disorders, more psychoneurotic breakdowns, more crime, more gambling, more drunkenness, more narcotics, than ever in our history.

## God—Not Gadgets

Our lust for lounging has produced a finer couch on which to lie but it has brought no quietness to our souls. That comes not from gadgets—but from God!

Think, finally, of the ease of the spiritual. It comes before us in a sharp outburst by the prophet Amos: "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion"—Amos 6:1. "In Zion," of all places, where those who profess to be the people of God have their temple and their tasks, a sluggish and falsely secure indifference has descended like some withering blight. The prophet goes on to say that these men and women of Israel and Judah "Lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches"—verse 4.

Here is the lust for lounging at its worst—where it shrivels the nerves and loosens the fiber of those who are supposed to be spiritually-minded.

My boldly stated conviction is that we are taking it too easy in our discipleship. Let me pinpoint it for you, if I may.

## Self-Denial — Self Discipline

We are taking it too soft and easy in our spiritual self-discipline. We are tragically irregular and undisciplined, and quite frankly we are uncaring about our prayer-life.

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