

Romans 12:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;

Analysis

Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; This verse contains three staccato commands on Christian diligence. **Not slothful in business** (τῇ σπουδῇ μὴ ὀκνηροί, *tē spoudē mē oknēroi*) literally reads 'not lazy in zeal' or 'not hesitant in earnestness'—the 'business' here isn't commerce but eager activity in God's service. Paul condemns spiritual laziness, the sluggish half-heartedness that plagues religious duty. Second, **fervent in spirit** (τῷ πνεύματι ζέοντες, *tō pneumati zeontes*) uses the verb 'to boil'—fiery, passionate devotion. The spirit could be the human spirit or the Holy Spirit; either way, genuine Christianity burns hot, not lukewarm (Revelation 3:15-16).

The third phrase, **serving the Lord** (τῷ κυρίῳ δουλεύοντες, *tō kyriō douleuontes*), grounds all activity in slavery to Christ—*douleuō* means 'to serve as a slave.' This isn't self-generated enthusiasm but slavery to a Master. Our zeal is directed toward him, our diligence expended for his glory. Some manuscripts read 'serving the time' (*kairō*), meaning 'seizing opportunities,' but 'Lord' (*kyriō*) is better attested. Regardless, the verse combats both frantic activism (zeal without serving the Lord) and passive quietism (serving the Lord without zeal).

Historical Context

The Greco-Roman world valued *otium* (leisure) for aristocrats while slaves and laborers performed manual work. Jewish tradition emphasized diligent Torah study and faithful worship. Paul synthesizes these: Christians should be zealous, not lazy, but their zeal serves Christ, not worldly ambition. In the Roman church, some may

have lapsed into spiritual complacency, treating faith as cultural identity rather than passionate devotion. Paul's exhortation recalls Jesus's rebuke of Laodicean lukewarmness (Revelation 3:14-22).

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. In what areas of Christian life have you become 'slothful'—prayer, Scripture reading, evangelism, service—and what reignites your diligence?
2. How would you describe the temperature of your spiritual life: cold, lukewarm, or 'fervent'—and what cultivates holy passion?
3. Are you 'serving the Lord' in your daily work, or merely serving yourself, your employer, or others' expectations?

Interlinear Text

τῇ	σπουδῇ	μὴ	ὀκνηροί	τῷ	πνεύματι	ζέοντες	τῷ
G3588	in business	Not	slothful	G3588	in spirit	fervent	G3588
	G4710	G3361	G3636		G4151	G2204	

Κυρίῳ	δουλεύοντες
the Lord	serving
G2962	G1398

Additional Cross-References

Acts 18:25 (Spirit): This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.

1 Peter 4:8 (Sin): And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

Proverbs 13:4 (Parallel theme): The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.

Hebrews 12:28 (Parallel theme): Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:

Ephesians 4:28 (Parallel theme): Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

1 Peter 1:22 (Spirit): Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:

Acts 20:19 (References Lord): Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews:

Matthew 24:12 (Sin): And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

Proverbs 22:29 (Sin): Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men.

Proverbs 10:26 (Parallel theme): As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to them that send him.