

Training in Godliness

1 Timothy 4:7-10

“7 Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; 8 for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. 9 The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. 10 For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.”

Paul is contrasting here two groups of people: 1) Those who put their focus and energy into an appearance of godliness that is actually self-serving and looks more the works of the flesh listed in Galatians 5:22, and 2) those who put their focus and energy into training themselves for true godliness. If godliness here has the meaning of “right reverence” and devotion toward God that begins in the heart and results in worship and external righteous living that flows out of this reverence, worship, and devotion, then it is the difference between devoting ourselves to serving God or devoting ourselves to serving ourselves. In either case, it results in an outward expression of the fruit of the Spirits or the works of the flesh.

This passage also tells us that true godliness requires training. In Hebrews 5:14, the words “constant practice” that leads to maturity is mentioned. Godliness that means an all-around God-centered life requires work and discipline on our part. Even with the completely unearned gift of faith, the Holy Spirit does not just produce all the fruits of the Spirit as we float through life (or are tossed to and by the waves) solely through a decision to cast our sins at the feet of Jesus. We have to constantly practice, train, and keep on training in order to “attain to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”...we all know what happens to your muscles when you work out and build strength then stop for even a short time. We have to discipline ourselves (which I am not very good at myself!). Paul says in this passage and others that they toil and strives in their ministries. Then of course there is Jesus, who says in Luke 9 “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever saves his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.” Notice he doesn’t say to say a prayer, occasionally ask for forgiveness, go to church, and have a good life. He calls us to take up our cross daily and follow.

What is the result of training ourselves for godliness? We are the heirs of promises both for now and for eternity. Psalm 37:4-5 says “Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act. Verse 11 says “the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace.” There are promises of favor and honor, no good thing being withheld, desires of the heart fulfilled, salvation when we cry, satisfied rest, protection, life, a crown of life, riches and honor and life (Psalm 84:11, 145:19, Proverbs 19:23, 22:4, James 1:12). And in Matthew 6:33, Jesus tells us, “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you.” Because we have a God who lives, we can hope in these promises as we seek him daily while resting in his mercy and grace!

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