

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## Godly Profit

*But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation. For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe. These things command and teach. (1 Timothy 4:7-11, KJV 1900)*

*For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.* Does Paul here intend for us to conclude that our godly living earns our eternal life? Or, for that matter, given Paul's use of "godliness" in First Timothy 3:16 as a specific reference to the Incarnation, does he rather direct us to focus our lives on the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by His finished work during the Incarnation, gives us eternal life now and for eternity? If this be the point that Paul makes, our life originates in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, but we experience a quality of life and fellowship with God through Him that we could not possibly know apart from our fellowship with Him.

*Expositor's Greek New Testament* commentary indicates that the structure of the verse does not allow the interpretation that our righteous living earns our life.

It is not the genitive of apposition, *piety promises life*. That which is given by life to Christians is the best thing that life has to give.<sup>1</sup>

A simple exploration will indicate that Paul did not here teach that our righteous living earns our eternal life. Let's put eternal life aside for a moment and focus on this life. Can we reasonably conclude from Paul's words, or from rational human experience, that physical exercise causes us to exist and that failure to engage in physical exercise causes us not to exist? Of course not; exercise to the physical body promotes strength and health, but it does not cause our existence.

Clearly Paul draws a corollary between the benefits of physical exercise to the physical body and spiritual exercise "...unto godliness..." to the spiritual person. As the commentary rightly observes, "That which is given by life to Christians is the best thing that life has to give." What Paul

directs us to practice in this lesson has to do with our spiritual health and vitality, not with our spiritual existence. In fact, his primary point is that the spiritual exercise that he exhorts gives us far greater health and vitality of spirit than any physical exercise program could possibly give to our physical body.

Take away your hope of heaven. Now stand at the bedside of a loved one who is rapidly slipping away from you into death. What comfort can you find? Paul describes just such a moment.

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. (1 Corinthians 15:19)

No belief in the resurrection, only hope in Christ for this life, produces the most miserable of people. Now put yourself back at the bedside of your loved one who is slipping away in death, but bring the Person and presence of the Lord Jesus Christ to bear on the moment. The height of misery changes into a precious moment of hope. To believe in Christ, but to deny the resurrection and our life with God throughout eternity, is the illogical equivalent to the dead atheist all dressed up in his coffin. He's all dressed up, but nowhere to go.

Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints. (Psalm 116:15)

That which is precious in the Lord's sight becomes precious to you as well, but only as you view that event through the eyes of a faith that is anchored in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself. While I am thankful that the Bible is broken into chapters and verses, I occasionally regret this artificial subdivision, for it often leads Bible students to ignore context and to view one verse as if it existed in a vacuum rather than in a flowing literary context, a context created by the Holy Spirit as He guided the inspired writers to compile these sixty-six books of our Bible.

This piecemeal interpretation typically appears when we impose our personal ideas onto a term or word in a verse, rather than checking the context to see how that term or word is used elsewhere in the

<sup>1</sup> Newport J.D. White, "The First and Second Epistles to Timothy and the Epistle to Titus", in *The Expositor's Greek Testament, Volume IV: Commentary*, 124 (New York: George H. Doran Company).

context of the verse we are studying. For example, Romans 8:28 has been beaten to death by people who isolate it from its context and then try to force it to teach things that other Scriptures refute. Just ask someone to explain Paul's use of "...all things..." in this verse, and you'll get an earful of explanations. However, few interpretations indeed will stop, step back, and examine the context of this verse. When we take this added and wise step, we readily discover that just four verses later, Paul used exactly the same term, "all things," in Romans 8:32.

*He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us **all things**? (Emphasis added)*

To interpret "all things" in Romans 8:28 in such a way that we illogically conclude that God and Satan are partners in accomplishing what is good for us wholly contradicts a multitude of Scriptures, as well as this passage. However, if we allow the Holy Spirit through Paul's inspired words in this context to define the "all things" of Romans 8:28 by his precise use of the same term in Romans 8:32, we reach a sound, Biblically correct, and safe conclusion. God alone works for our good, and the things that God does for our good, all such things, He invested in the Person and work of His Son. Whatever we receive through the life and death of the Lord Jesus Christ (all such things, not just part of them) undoubtedly, and always, work together. And they always work together for our good. Neither Scripture, nor our sense of moral reasoning will lead us to conclude that every event that unfolds in human history always—without exception—works together, much less, works together for the good of people who love God. Scripture elsewhere names specific things that God didn't cause, things that worked disgrace and ruin for God's people in their lives. Cancer, the murder and devastation caused by a deranged madman, untimely death of a loved one, and other such things do not come to us through the accomplishments of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they do not always, if ever, work together, much less work together for our good. However, as we study Scripture and learn of things that we receive specifically from God through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, we may safely and rightly conclude that they always work together for our good. In this example, Paul adds his inspired definition to a generic and non-specific term, a definition that we learn by simply reading the full context of his writing, not one single verse as if it existed all alone.

Advocates of the idea that every event that occurs in human history is either caused or "permitted" by God and is always used by Him to bring about ultimate good, will occasionally play out the dual logical fallacies of horns of the dilemma and red herring with this question, "Well, don't you

believe that God can, and sometimes does, intervene in the affairs of men to bring about something good?" Anyone who studies the Bible must believe that God on occasion so intervenes; in fact, He does so frequently. However, this question has nothing to do with the passage at all. Paul is not dealing with a category of events in which God occasionally intervenes and turns against the design of wicked men. He is dealing with a unique category in which the activities, the "all things," work together—and for good to those who love the Lord—always, without exception. Only one category exists that can be so defined as always working together for good to those who love the Lord, and that category of things comes to us from God based on the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the final outcome of "godliness" as Paul defines this term in 1 Timothy 3:16. I never need to worry or doubt about anything that God gives me through His Son. If He loved me so dearly as to not spare, but rather deliver up His Son for me, I may safely live in the amazing comfort that all such things are good—and for my good.

Similarly, in our study context, Paul has already introduced the term "godliness" for our consideration in First Timothy 3:16, and his definition of the term in this context focused exclusively on the Incarnation and finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, not complete till He was "...received up into glory." Thus, when we ignore chapter and verse division and read just six verses passed this condensed confession of faith, we see the same word, not once, but three times in three successive verses. On what logical or literary basis can we impose a different definition onto the term "godliness" in these verses (1 Timothy 4:6, 7, 8) than Paul's clear use of the word in First Timothy 3:16? There is no basis for a different definition, none whatever. The "good doctrine" of Verse 6, the focus of our spiritual exercise in Verse 7, and the value of that spiritual exercise in Verse 8 all draw us back to an active Christian life that anchors everything we think and do to our God and Savior. Spiritual activity, a form of "godliness," that stands on any other ground is a false form of godliness, a charade and not the "real thing."

A firm belief in this Biblical "sound doctrine," this truth that God has directed His churches to protect, proclaim, and defend as that truth's pillar and ground, is not an empty-headed philosophy. It is a robust worldview that motivates an active, godly life. That godly life is Christ-centric. It is not man-centric. Those who truly embrace this belief are highly motivated to overcome sin in their own lives. They are equally motivated to the proclamation of that truth to God's children. This motivation is not an automatic thing, but a firm and clear belief in the truth of 1 Timothy 3:16 distinctly motivates us to this active behavior of "godliness" in the sense of Paul's use of the term in this context. How is our exercise program going? We have good reason to go to work at it, don't we?

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Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
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