

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Lay Hold

But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses. (1 Timothy 6:11–12, KJV 1900)

We occasionally hear people encouraging their fellows with such expressions as "Grab life by the horns," meaning to enjoy life to the fullest extent possible. That is precisely the spiritual point Paul is making to Timothy in the expression, "...lay hold on eternal life..." Timothy needs to develop his spiritual graces and exercises to the maximum possible extent. Serving God faithfully cannot be reduced to a matter of convenience. It must command the upper-most priority of our life if we live up to this lesson.

In this expression in 1 Tm 6:12...no doubt also suggests some activity associated with the state of eternal life.¹

Some Christians have eternal life but never really lay hold of it.²

Jesus teaches a similar point.

The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. (John 10:10, KJV 1900)

"...activity associated with the state of eternal life" does not mean obtaining that life. Rather it refers to how we use it, what we do with it. The abundance of life that Jesus describes relates to how closely we live to Him and to His fold after the new birth. He gives us eternal life. (John 10:28) He doesn't offer it to us. We don't cooperate with Him to obtain it. He gives it. Further, He opens the door of the sheepfold so that His sheep may go in and out, find pasture, and live their lives, their spiritual lives, to the fullest. He does not coerce or force them to so live, but He clearly removes all obstacles from their full enjoyment. If hindrances diminish that joyful,

full life, they come from the sheep, not from the Shepherd.

When the Lord calls us to follow Him, He warns us of the prerequisite for self-denial, but He also urges us on with such lessons as we read here. No one ever truly invested his heart and life in serving God who didn't receive far greater blessings than he invested. I recall a conversation with my father shortly after my baptism. I was struggling intensely with a conviction to preach, though I had not at that time disclosed that conviction to anyone, not even to my family. In addition, I had a nearly insatiable hunger to go to church and to read my Bible. The rural church I joined still observed the old circuit-rider custom of having church one weekend a month; two services, one on Saturday and one on Sunday. My family had not been to church for a couple of weeks because of this practice, and I was miserable every Sunday morning. I wanted—and I needed—to be in church. Early on Sunday morning, Dad and I were taking care of some chores related to our dairy cattle. I asked him about going to a nearby church that held its services on that weekend. With little thought, he said he simply didn't have enough money to buy the fuel to go. Without hesitation, I volunteered to buy the fuel out of my meager resources. He declined, and I spent one miserable day at home. When Dad told me that we couldn't afford to go to church, I responded that God always makes a way for us to do what He teaches us to do, and he certainly teaches us to attend His church regularly. Several years later, Dad told me that my comments stung his conscience deeply, and he really wanted to go, but he was too proud to accept my offer to buy the fuel.

God's gift of eternal life does not require any contribution or prerequisite from us. Scripture occasionally describes it as giving life to the dead, and a dead person certainly cannot do anything to gain life; after all, he's dead. However, Scripture overflows with instructions to living children of God regarding how they are to use the life that God gives them. The free gift of eternal life is not intended to lie passively in the corner after God gives it to us. Paul's lesson to Timothy, "...lay hold..." addresses this active instruction to put that holy life to godly and wise use. Be active and use it according to God's directions.

¹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., 806 (New York: United Bible societies, 1996).

² Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, 1 Ti 6:12 (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003).

Occasionally as our three daughters were growing up, Sandra and I scratched our heads at the challenge of trying to parent three daughters who were as uniquely different from each other as three people could be. One of our favorite quips in the midst of those challenging moments was, "When God gave us this child, He didn't give us an owner's manual." No doubt most parents experience this overwhelming sensation at times. God actually gives us far more specific instructions about child-rearing than most parents, we included, acknowledge. "Train **up** a child..." (Proverbs 22:6; emphasis added) sets the stage for God's directions to parents. Sadly in our time all too many homes reveal that the child is training **down** the parents. The parents vacate their responsibility and passively allow the child to do whatever the child wants to do.

While God provides parents with an excellent manual for their child rearing, He has given us a comprehensive Book, packed full of directions to His children regarding their godly use of the life that He gave them. We cannot plead ignorance when we disobey God. Many years ago I was talking with a young lady who had grown up in the church that I serve, but she left her teaching and wandered onto the wrong side of godly Christian conduct. She was quite open and honest in her confession of her sins, something that I appreciated. During the conversation, she referred to her specific sin and questioned, "Joe, why didn't you teach me how wrong this was?" I reminded her that I had taught on this particular question many times. Was she listening? Then I confronted her with her own godly conviction. Did she actually enter into this sin in ignorance? Did she not know she was doing wrong? At that point, she melted and fully confessed that ignorance was not the issue. She knew by the Holy Spirit's powerful witness within that she was sinning. It was not my lack of teaching or the Holy Spirit's lack of conviction. She made a knowing, conscious choice to walk the path of sin, not righteousness. She walked away from the abundant life. She refused to "...lay hold on eternal life..." to which God had called and convicted her. The outcome was not good. My friend, if you choose to ignore God's conviction and the Biblical knowledge of God's righteous lifestyle, the outcome will not be good for you either. We may choose the pleasure or convenience of the moment, but the long-term end results will always take us back to God's judgment. His smiling "Well done" always results in a better outcome than His chastening frowns. You may deceive yourself. We often do so. You may deceive the people around you. But never for a moment think that you can deceive God.

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. (Galatians 6:7 KJV)

Do not think, even for a nanosecond, that you can deceive God. Nor can you possibly mock Him by living contrary to His commandments and still finding the good life. It never happens. He will not be mocked.

God called Timothy precisely to lay hold on the life He gave to Timothy and put it to God's use, not Timothy's. In the sixth chapter of Romans, Paul directs us to "yield" our bodies to God as instruments, weapons in God's hands as we—and He through us—fight the good fight of faith against our common enemy. To "yield" our bodies, as Paul there teaches, requires that we begin by yielding our minds, hearts, and wills to God. The body ordinarily follows where the mind leads. A stubborn, rebellious heart cannot subdue the body.

At times I hear sincere Christians use strange language. To form an opinion on their terms, you'd think that, no matter what the mind does, the Christian's body never obeys God, never submits to the spiritual direction of the heart. In fact, I've heard some of these folks describe their body as fully depraved and wholly incapable of doing anything good. ***There is one major problem with this idea. Scripture doesn't support it.*** Aside from the sixth chapter of Romans, two passages deal quite specifically with our employment of our bodies in serving God.

*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye **present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.** (Romans 12:1 KJV; emphasis added)*

*For ye are bought with a price: therefore **glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.** (1 Corinthians 6:20 KJV; emphasis added)*

If our physical body remains apart from our spirit and/or soul after regeneration, and therefore remains totally depraved, how can we possibly integrate our physical body in serving and glorifying God, precisely the point these passages teach? It would be impossible. A very small segment of folks who left the faith of Scripture near the beginning of the twentieth century taught a version of the Mormon idea of pre-created souls³, along with this kind of non-integration of the spiritual with the material, to the extent that they denied the final resurrection of our physical body. During researching some of their teachings, I once encountered a saying from one of these men, "That which comes from God returns to God at death, and that which came from the earth returns to the earth at death." He went on to affirm his belief that the body that returns to the earth would never experience resurrection. Not only does this teaching deny Scripture's teaching regarding the

³ They called it "eternal vital union."

literal resurrection of our bodies, but it also effectively denies the significant impact that God makes on and in us in the new birth. These folks often also taught that we never do any act of obedience apart from God's direct intervention, in which we remain as passive as we were in the new birth. Is it any wonder that hungry sheep become confused? Such confusion grows out of the error that the body remains depraved and incapable of submission to our spiritual minds in serving God. Try going to church next Sunday, singing spiritual hymns, and sitting on the pew, listening to the sermon without any use of your physical body.

Not only did God call Timothy to lay hold on the eternal life that He gave Timothy at the new birth, but Paul also encouraged Timothy to continue in the godly, faithful, and active course that he had walked already.

...whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

Timothy had done some things right. Paul urges him—commands him—to keep it up with godly consistency. How is it with you? How fully have you laid hold of the glorious eternal life that the Lord gave to you? What can you do this week to use it more fully and graciously?

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor