

THE PROFITEERS

1 TIMOTHY 4:8-9 JUNE 6, 2018

First Timothy, chapter 4 is where we're turning to this evening. We're taking a look at Paul's 5 "faithful sayings" that he shared with Titus and Timothy at the end of his life. They are 5 key and trustworthy statements that Paul doesn't want us to miss as we live out our Christian faith.

Tonight we've come to the third saying on the list and probably most of us are familiar with it or have heard it talked about at one point or another. But, more than the first two, *this* saying is nested inside some other ideas Paul has been developing in the surrounding verses. I don't want to tear the principle out of its context, so I'll read the section, giving the greater flow of thought and then we'll focus in on the faithful saying itself.

We'll begin at First Timothy, chapter 4, verse 1.

1 Timothy 4:1-11 - Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ² speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, ³ forbidding to marry, *and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.* ⁴ For every creature of God *is* good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; ⁵ for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. ⁶ If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed. ⁷ But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. ⁸ For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. ⁹ *This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance.* ¹⁰ For to this *end* we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is *the* Savior of all men, especially of those who believe. ¹¹ These things command and teach.

"Bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things." Whenever I hear that verse I can't help think of the tv show *Survivor*. It's been around long enough that I'm sure most of you have a basic understanding of how it works. Contestants stranded on an island and over the course of 39 days they compete to outwit, outlast and outplay each other, voting players off until finally the winner is crowned as sole survivor and given a check for a million dollars.

I think of the show when I hear this verse because there's *usually* someone competing who comes into the game with perfectly sculpted, rippling muscles. They tower over the regular looking folks. But if you look at the winners of the 36 seasons of *Survivor*, they're very rarely that guy. In fact, a *lot* of times those Hercules looking guys don't actually do well in challenges that require real-world strength, agility and endurance. *Visible* muscles aren't always indicators of the kind of strength required to win the game. They are sometimes mostly about show, rather than substance.

Here in our text Paul references diet and exercise, and people showing so-called spiritual muscles, but that's not what his faithful saying is about. This one is all about *true* Godliness. The *faithful saying* is what we call verse 8b. Here it is:

"Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come."

Now, there are some Bible commentators who feel that the faithful saying comes *after* verse 9, not before. But a strong linguistic and logical case is made showing that Paul is talking about verse 8b, not verse 10 when he says “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance.” Paul wants us to know just how important and *profitable* Godliness is.

So what exactly does Paul mean by ‘Godliness’? If he wants us to pursue it, we need to have a working definition of what he’s talking about. The natural man has a knee-jerk reaction when he’s trying to define this idea. It’s very easy to think of Godliness as an ever-increasing list of good things we *do* and bad things we *don’t do*. It’s easy to think of Godliness as moral performance. And, while *obeying* God is a vital and non-negotiable characteristic of Christian faith, we should notice that, in this passage, Paul is warning Timothy *against* the kind of mindset that simply sees Godliness as a list of legalistic rules.

Rather, he explained in the previous chapter that *Godliness* is Jesus. In 1 Timothy 3:16, Paul says, “The mystery of Godliness is this,” and then goes on to describe the Person and work of Jesus Christ. To *walk* in Godliness is to be in faithful communion with our Savior. It’s not that we perform some work in order to merit favor from God, but rather we accept the gift of His Godliness and trust Him to do what He wants in our minds, in our hearts, in our attitudes. We walk in submission, going *His* way, being molded and developed according to His power and purpose. R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell wrote it this way: “*Jesus is the essence and wellspring of godliness. He lived in godliness, and now as ascended Lord he gives us godliness. Godliness is not external but is the inner power to live a godly life...It is active—kinetic obedience that springs from a reverent awe of God.*”¹

So now that we have a working definition, we can pay attention to what Paul says, which is that we should *exercise* Godliness and that Godly living is *profitable*. What does it mean to *exercise* Godliness? Well, Paul gives a lot of tangible means throughout the book. But they boil down to this: Live out your Christianity, not for show-muscles like on *Survivor*, but *really* exercise. The word Paul uses is the word we get ‘gymnasium’ from, where the Greeks would go to devote themselves to training for the great games that they might lay hold of that crown of victory. That’s the exercise mindset Paul wants us to have concerning Godliness, and he says that it will be *profitable* for us. By looking at the context and the ideas in this text, we get a good sense of what Paul means when he says that.

First, we should note that Godliness is profitable on a *personal* level. Paul encouraged Timothy that, as he lived out his God-given Godliness, he was going to keep his spiritual life personally nourished (v6). He would protect his heart from error (v7). He would continue to mature into the man God was making him to be. And he would actually get to *enjoy* life by receiving the blessings God gives to His people (v3-5).

So often the idea of ‘Godliness’ is falsely associated with subtraction. It’s called ‘asceticism,’ which is a severe form of self-denial, where enjoyment is bad and you keep taking things away so that everyone sees how pious you are. Paul was talking to Timothy directly about this in chapter 4. He said, “there are people coming who will say, ‘You can’t be married and be Godly,’ or, ‘You have to eat a certain diet to be Godly.’” But then he pointed out that *that* kind of ritual religion is actually a counterfeit Godliness which denies the good gifts God wants to give to His people. These things that God created to be received with thanksgiving are now labeled as evil or sacrilegious. Paul cuts

¹ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/what-is-godlinesses-paul-s-first-letter-to-timothy.html>

through all that stuff and says that *true* Godliness is *personally* profitable not just for spiritual maturity, but it also helps us to enjoy the day-to-day blessings God wants to give.

Not only is Godliness profitable on the *personal* level, it's also profitable on the *practical* level. Timothy was a pastor in Ephesus and was responsible for the flock there. Paul showed how a life of Godliness had immense, practical value for him. But it also does for all of us, even if we're not serving as a pastor in the Church.

First of all, Godliness makes you a good minister (v6). The word Paul uses there is not limited to the office of a bishop. It's the Greek word *diakonos*. While the term *can* refer to the specific office in the Church, it is more generally just the word for a servant. Jesus said in John 12: "If anyone serves Me (*diakone*), let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant (*diakonos*) will be also."

The first practical profit of living out the Godly life is that it will make us good servants of our Master. And that, of course, is a major goal, isn't it? That on the last day we will hear those words: "Well done, good and faithful *servant*?" Paul says that if we exercise Godliness, *that* will be the result. And not *only* will we develop into great servants, it will have other practical effects that profit us.

We will grow in our ability to discern the truth. It will keep us from being ripped off by religious con-men and their false teachings. We will be growing in our ability to understand God's will for our lives. We will be able to counsel others. Remember - Paul repeatedly talks to Timothy about instructing others and sharing the truth with them.

Living out a Godly life, Paul says, is profitable for *all* things. This is really important for us to focus in on. We're used to exercises that benefit certain groups of muscles or parts of the body, right? You've got chest and arms day, cardio day, and leg day (which no one does). But exercising Godliness doesn't just benefit us on a *spiritual* level or just on the ultimate eternal level. Paul says, "This is a faithful saying: Godliness is profitable for *all* things in your life." Your spiritual health, your mental health, your long-term goals and your day-to-day decisions, your relationships and your struggles. They're all impacted by this powerful Godliness given to us through Jesus Christ.

This is one of the reasons why it's so sad that some people are what we might call 'Sunday Christians'. They come to Church, participate and receive. But then the rest of their lives are walled off from the leading and empowering of Jesus. They just live a natural life the rest of the week, opening themselves up for just 75 minutes on Sunday. Paul would not only rebuke them, he would express to them that they are truly missing out on blessing and power and assistance and protection that God gives to His people *when they walk with Him*. They're living the spiritual equivalent of *my physical* exercise life. Once every other month I do a couple pushups. Guess what: I'm *not* going to win a gold medal in *any* sport, whether it's the winter or the summer games! Why not? Well, I'm not living the life of an athlete. I'm not in the gym pressing toward that goal. It's obvious.

But so often, when it comes to a relationship to God, people wonder why they're not empowered when they don't open themselves up for His filling. They wonder why they're not *growing* when they don't take His nourishment. They get ripped off by false teachings because they haven't allowed the mind of Christ to develop. It's not that God has shortchanged them. It's that they're not training and running the race. Paul told Timothy that this Christian life is one to be "carefully followed," which means to *purposefully* go along with what God has said and submit to His rule over your life.

And we note that throughout this section and, really, throughout the book, Paul is really *urging* Timothy to take these things seriously. I'm confident Timothy was. He was a seasoned, faithful

servant of God, but he still needed this encouragement and reminder, which means we do too. And that brings me to the last aspect of this faithful saying: Not only is Godliness profitable on a *personal* level and profitable on a *practical* level, but we're reminded that this is a *pressing* issue.

The chapter opens up with that strong statement: "The Spirit *expressly* says." And here Paul tells Timothy that Godliness is not just for *improvement* in our own maturity or in our ministry, but it's also necessary *preparation* for the challenges that we face on this side of eternity. There were going to be consistent attacks coming against the Church and against believers. Living out a Godly life was going to be the necessary preparation to withstand those attacks, whether they were in the form of false teachers or slides into legalism or carnal lusts. The best defense was a Godly life, empowered by the Lord Jesus Christ. And Paul also reminds us that this is a life and death issue. What we're talking about is not just living a better life, though there's that component in the profitability of Godliness, we're talking about people's eternities. We're talking about men who need saving, and the Savior who only rescues those who believe and follow after Him.

The chapter closes with these words which help sew up Paul's thoughts on the issue:

1 Timothy 4:15-16 - ¹⁵ Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. ¹⁶ Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. It doesn't mean spirituality for show. It doesn't mean some rigid legalism by which a person hopes to earn points with God or a better seat at the table. Rather, it is realizing what Christ has done and wants to do for us and then making the choice to *be* Christlike and thereby receiving His power.

Peter put it this way:

2 Peter 1:3a - His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness

When we *exercise* this God-given Godliness, putting our devotion in obedient action, believing God is going to do what He says He wants to do, then there is profit not just for eternity, but for this life as well, in *all* things as God grows us, matures us, develops us, uses us, protects us, and blesses us. All this and more because of Him. This is a faithful saying. We can hang our lives on it. Let's give ourselves *entirely* to this wonderful, powerful God.