
The Bible says, “For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come…” (1 Timothy 4:8, NIV). What does this mean?

Answer:

If you read the context in the earlier verses of this passage, you’ll find that Paul is addressing false teachers who were advocating for outward, ritualistic practices as the key to a holy life. These teachers were promoting certain external behaviors, such as strict dietary rules (e.g., not eating certain foods), circumcision, ritual washings, or excessive asceticism, believing that these actions could make a person holy or acceptable to God.

However, Paul points out that these practices, while they might have temporary value for the body, do not address the deeper needs of the soul. Paul is not dismissing the importance of physical health or discipline, but he’s emphasizing that godliness living a life that honors God through faith in Christ is far more beneficial, both now and in eternity.

Paul’s Point: Physical Practices vs. Spiritual Life

Paul’s argument in 1 Timothy 4:8 (NIV) contrasts the temporary value of physical exercise (or bodily disciplines) with the eternal and all-encompassing value of godliness (spiritual devotion). Physical exercise does offer some benefit to the body it can improve health and extend life in this world. But it can never secure eternal life, nor can it transform the heart and mind in the way godliness does.

In Colossians 2:20-23 (NIV), Paul provides further clarification on this point:

> *“Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules:*

**‘Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!’

These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and

teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility, and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.”

Here, Paul is saying that even though these outward religious rules might seem wise or pious, they don’t deal with the deeper issue of sin and the desires of the flesh. True holiness comes from a heart transformed by faith in Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, not through mere physical discipline or human-made rules.

Godliness: The Fear of God and Holiness

The key point Paul is making is that godliness (which can be understood as holiness or piety) is the path that leads to true life both in this world and in the life to come. This godliness is not about external rituals but about internal transformation that comes from a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. As the NIV Study Bible notes, godliness refers to a reverent, respectful relationship with God that is lived out in practical holiness.

The fear of God the reverence, awe, and respect we have for God’s holiness and sovereignty is what keeps us grounded in our spiritual lives. This fear of God is foundational to wisdom and

righteousness (Proverbs 9:10). As we live out this reverence, we experience spiritual growth, peace, and joy that surpasses anything the world can offer.

Godliness and Eternal Life

In 1 Timothy 4:8, Paul points to a two-fold promise that comes with godliness:

Promise for the present life: A godly life leads to peace, purpose, and health. This isn’t a guarantee of perfect physical well-being, but it’s a promise that God will protect and provide for His faithful people. The Lord’s peace can sustain us in the midst of trials, and He promises to be with us in every season of life.

Promise for the life to come: Ultimately, godliness leads to eternal life. Unlike physical exercise, which only benefits the body for a limited time, godliness brings eternal reward. This is the hope of the Christian faith eternal life with God (John 3:16, Romans 6:23).

The True Security of the Soul

While accumulating wealth or seeking worldly success might offer temporary security, it cannot protect the soul. In Matthew 16:26

(NIV), Jesus asks, “What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?” Wealth and physical protection can only offer temporary security, but they can never address the deeper need for salvation and eternal life.

However, when we live a life of godliness, which is rooted in faith in Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we not only gain the promise of peace and provision in this life, but we also inherit eternal life (Romans 8:17, 1 Peter 1:4). This is a life of eternal security, built on a firm foundation of faith in Christ.

Why Choose Godliness?

So, why not choose godliness? In a world that constantly tempts us with temporary pleasures and fleeting rewards, the Christian is called to focus on what truly lasts. Godliness is what will lead us to fulfillment, peace, and ultimately, eternal life with God.

As Paul writes in 1 Timothy 4:8 (NIV),

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This is the simple, clear choice Paul is urging Timothy and all of us to make. Let us prioritize spiritual disciplines that lead to godliness, rather than chasing after fleeting physical accomplishments or material gain.

God bless you.

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