

EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

“...FOR THE EQUIPPING OF THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF SERVICE...” ~ EPHESIANS 4:12

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A TRUSTWORTHY STATEMENT (1 TIM 4:7–10)

By Andrew Dow

We have recently been examining a handful of Paul’s instructions to Timothy and Titus. In each case Paul points out that his teaching is **“a trustworthy statement”** (1 Tim 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim 2:11; Titus 3:8). This indicates the importance of these statements while removing any doubt as to their truthfulness. Paul writes, **“Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance. For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers”** (1 Tim 4:7b–10, NASB).

Bodily Discipline

“For bodily discipline is only of little profit” (1 Tim 4:8a). Exercise is important. We have been given bodies and are expected to take care of them (1 Cor 3:16-17; 6:19–20). Without proper care our bodies will fall into disrepair and become unusable. Paul rightly points out that training the physical body is profitable, however the profit is limited. People involved in business understand the idea of profit. If you want to succeed in the business world you must strive to increase profit. Poor profits indicate poor decision

making. Paul tells us here not to invest too heavily in bodily exercise.

How many people do we know investing large amounts of time exercising and training their physical bodies? Don't misunderstand me, exercise is good. However, Paul is hinting at the fact that there is something that will render a greater profit than physical exercise. As any good investor will tell you, go with what will give you the greatest profit. But what is it that will profit us greatly?

Godliness

“Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness ... godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” (1 Tim 4:7, 8). Instead of exercising physically, Paul encourages us to exercise spiritually.

We are to exercise for the purpose of godliness, but what is godliness? Our initial reaction might be to say that to be godly is to be like God, but that is not the full sense of the word. Thayer defines the Greek word *eusebeia* as “piety towards God.” One who is godly has a reverence or respect for God. Therefore, Paul is telling us to exercise ourselves, not so that we are physically healthy, but so that we fear and worship God.

Paul makes a contrast here between physical and spiritual exercise. Bodily exercise profits a little, but if you attain godliness (*i.e.*, the fear of God) it is profitable for all things. It profits us now and in the future. We exercise ourselves spiritually in order to reach the ultimate goal (1 Cor 9:24-27; Heb 12:1-2). The Christian's goal prompts us to discipline ourselves.

The Reason for Such Discipline

Paul reassures the reader, **“It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance. For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers”** (1 Tim 4:9–10). This text never suggests a half-hearted approach to spiritual exercise, but rather we “labor and strive” for it. The reason we work so hard for this can be summed up in the words, **“our hope.”**

“We labor and strive because we have fixed our hope on the living God” (1 Tim 4:10). Hope is one of the most motivating factors in the Christian’s life (1 Cor 13:13; 1 Thess 1:3). Christians are to be hopeful people; not like those **“who have no hope”** (1 Thess 4:13). Christians take comfort in the hope of **“a better country”** (Heb 11:16)!

Paul reminds Timothy that our hope rests on **“the living God”** (1 Tim 4:10). Some place their hope in money, wealth, physical pleasure, or people. The problem is that worldly things always disappoint: **“The elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up”** (2 Pet 3:10). This is why we **“store up for [ourselves] treasures in heaven”** (Matt 6:20). While the world hopes in corruptible things, we hope in the incorruptible.

“We have fixed our hope on... the Savior of all men, especially of believers” (1 Tim 4:10). Is Paul suggesting that God will save men regardless of whether they are obedient? This question misses Paul’s point in context. Here Paul glorifies God in two ways: (1) God is alive, and (2) God has the ability to save all men. After all, this is why we have hope in God. Hope in God would be

useless if one of these two points were untrue. Rest assured that Jesus **“is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world”** (1 John 2:2). However, just because our Lord has been sacrificed to redeem all men does not mean that all men have taken (or must take) part in this salvation. Thus, Paul concludes that God is especially the Savior of the believer. In what do we have hope? If our hope is in the living Savior who can offer profit in the life to come we will labor and strive to discipline our bodies for godliness.

Conclusion

Paul encourages us with this trustworthy statement, **“bodily exercise is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things ... it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men”** (1 Tim 4:7–10). If we obtain godliness (*i.e.*, respect for God), then we will gain far more than bodily exercise can provide. We will gain hope in the living God who has promised to save all who submit to Him. May the hope of heaven motivate us to godliness!

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“GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES...”
(MATTHEW 28:19-20)