

## Week of March 10, 2013

### The Practice of Godliness

#### Passage Outline:

1. The Benefit of Godliness - 1 Timothy 4:7-10
2. The Basis of Godliness - Titus 3:1-8a
3. The Devotion to Godliness - Titus 3:8b-9

#### What's This About?

Our study is about spiritual discipline and the basis of godliness. Our study will help you live a godly life to the glory and honor of our Savior Jesus.

#### 1. The Benefit of Godliness - 1 Timothy 4:7-10

<sup>7</sup> Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance <sup>10</sup> (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe.

When I read verse 7, an image of Paul and Timothy flashes in my mind. If Paul had spoken these words face to face with the young pastor instead of writing, I see him firmly grasping Timothy's shoulders, looking with laser-beam intensity into his eyes, and saying forcefully yet compassionately, have nothing to do with irreverent and silly myths. How important is it that today's Christians need to hear Paul's warning and challenge.

Timothy must refuse, have nothing at all to do with, certain myths, or fables, described as irreverent, or godless. They also were silly, that they did not merit serious consideration. Paul wanted Timothy to kick aside as useless old wives tales that were junk-food for useless chatter. Today's equivalent might be feel good sermons that do little to expound the Biblical texts in any serious, or relevant manner.

Paul charged Timothy to train yourself in godliness. The verb *train* is a command in the original. From it we derive *gymnasium* and *gymnastics*. Train describes an athlete's strenuous, rigorous, work outs. *Train* also is present tense, indicating that getting in shape and staying in shape was to be Timothy's constant pursuit. Paul, however, applied the word not to winning athletic events, but to Timothy's vigorous training in godliness. Picture here an athlete giving every ounce of effort and energy to train for a future contest; so God's people work hard at spiritual development. Clearly, one's maturing in godliness calls for hard work. We must apply all our energy to pursuing the living God's purposes. We must exercise all our spiritual strength in vigorous development and application for God's glory alone.

**Please read the articles "Godliness: A First-Century Understanding," "First-Century Gymnasiums and Exercise" and "Bodily Exercise: The Gymnasium in the First Century" contained in the Heavy Duty Preparation Packet.**

Unfortunately such spiritual training is not the usual action of many believers today, but it should be. Any believer who wants to excel spiritually must really work at it. Roll up your spiritual sleeves and engage in self-denial, prayer, meditation, Bible study, ministries of service, self-examination, fellowship with other believers, and submissiveness to Christ so you can become a more godly believer.

Clearly, to Paul training for personal godliness was a higher priority than training for physical results. Personal godliness is a higher calling because it is beneficial in every way. How so? Physical training affects one's present life on earth. Spiritual training in godliness, however, affects present life and also the life to come

in heaven.

Confident that training in godliness was worth the effort, Paul said we, including himself, labor and strive for this. *Labor* means to work so hard and long that one becomes sapped of energy, weary, exhausted in the pursuit of personal godliness. *Strive* is similar in meaning to our English “agonize.” Godliness in both life and ministry demands energy and keeps on demanding it. But why the effort? Paul’s answer is that since Christians live in a daily state of hope in a living God, our hope in Him and His promises is not foolishness. Rather, because God lives He saves us unto eternal life.

Our living God, Paul wrote, is the Savior of everyone, especially of those who believe. Because of this verse, some think all people ultimately will live in heaven. However, the New Testament declares the reality of hell and that it is forever (Matt. 25:41,46; 2 Thess. 1:8-9; Rev. 20:11-15). How then should we understand Paul’s teaching? As Savior, Jesus will save believers, giving them forgiveness, justification, redemption, and heaven. But in general, Jesus is also Savior of unbelievers in that He has won those same blessings for them, if they would repent and turn to Jesus. The sad fact of the matter is that many people don’t and so bring on themselves eternal judgment.

## **2. The Basis of Godliness - Titus 3:1-8a**

<sup>1</sup> Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, <sup>2</sup> to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men. <sup>3</sup> At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. <sup>4</sup> But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup> so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. <sup>8</sup> This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.

Timothy was not the only pastor to whom Paul quoted a trustworthy saying. Another was Titus who served on the island of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea. After Paul’s release from prison at Rome, he traveled about in ministry. One place he and Titus ministered for a time was Crete. Paul left Titus there as his representative to help the churches with their doctrinal and organizational difficulties. From an unknown location, Paul later wrote the Letter to Titus, asking him to continue in ministry, encouraging him, and reminding him of the responsibilities he had as pastor. Imagine Titus’s joyful surprise when he received Paul’s letter.

Paul clearly stated what he wanted Titus to do—remind the Cretan Christians of his former teachings. What was that teaching? Generally it was to respect secular governmental authorities and all people as well. Regarding civil rulers and authorities, Paul required believers be submissive and obey them, willing to carry out every good work. Believers’ allegiance to Christ does not necessarily conflict with allegiance to the state. Paul instructed they should cooperate with government officials and even be ready for every good work as they join together for society’s good. Cooperating with state laws and working charitably for others’ benefits are Christians’ responsibilities.

Regarding relationships with all others on the island, both Christian and non-Christian, Paul described specifically how Cretan believers were to live. First, slander no one, don’t treat with contempt or disdain. Insulting and abusive language is out of place for God’s people. Second, Paul instructed believers to avoid fighting, meaning they were to be harmonious, not contentious. Third is the positive virtue of being kind, or forbearing in difficult circumstances. Fourth is always showing gentleness to all people. To show some gentleness to some people, is not challenging. However, to always be gentle to all people, well that is a challenge indeed! Only Christ living within can empower believers to live so godly. How do you measure up to

these godly qualities?

In verse 3 Paul included himself (we) in a list of seven specifics depicting life before Christ saved them. Why did Paul bring the past up and why now? Reflecting on our own former conditions before Christ saved us helps us practice godliness as well.

Here's what life before Christ was like for Paul and the Cretans.

1. We too were once foolish—unable to understand important truths about God and Christ;
2. Disobedient—heeding neither God's voice or personal conscience;
3. Deceived—misled by sin, the devil, and our own depraved conscience;
4. Enslaved by various passions and pleasures—bound to evil desires and unable to break free from them; we would call that an addiction today.
5. Living in malice and envy—the wickedness of ill-will and discontent;
6. Hateful and detesting one another—the end result of a total fracture of human relationships;

If today, believers would remember what their lives were before knowing Jesus Christ we would not be so harsh and critical of people still in that sinful condition. Instead we can be thankful Christ saved us from such a life and still relate to unbelievers as we strive, by our godly life, to win them to Christ.

So extravagant was God's grace to the undeserving that the first-century church penned yet another trustworthy saying for use as a confession in public worship. God our Savior stepped into the world with goodness and love to fix our estrangement from Him and placed us in a state of grace. God saved us, which is the main action in the entire trustworthy statement. We did not, and could not, save ourselves. Yes, God saved us, but His doing so was not by works of righteousness that we had done. There's no such thing. Salvation by human effort is impossible, Paul taught.

God saved us, but how exactly? First, God saved us by washing us clean from sin's guilt. This washing involved regeneration, or new birth which happened at our Baptism, as well as renewal, thus making new the person reborn. By His Holy Spirit, whom God poured out ... on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, sinners dead in sin come alive to Him.

That's not all He does for sinners. Paul continued saying, we have been justified by His grace. God justifies, declares believers righteous in His sight, not because of their own righteousness, but solely because of His grace. God counts our sins as belonging to Christ and Christ's righteousness becomes ours. To be justified is to be forgiven, delivered from the curse of sin since God placed that curse on Christ at the cross. The ultimate reward of God's salvation is so we may become heirs of eternal life. In view of God's saving grace, we commit ourselves to godly living. As God enables us to practice personal godliness, we will have a strongly influence others towards a godly lifestyles as well.

### **3. The Devotion to Godliness - Titus 3:8b-9**

<sup>8b</sup>These things are excellent and profitable for everyone. <sup>9</sup>But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless.

Paul had just highlights God's kindness and love for sinners, the Holy Spirit's powerfully working in bringing people to life, God's justifying sinners because of Jesus' death on their behalf, and that those who are His live as heirs of eternal life in heaven. These are the things Titus had to insist on in the church. Knowing the truth *and* living in that truth are God's expectations of His people. If our religion is only taught but never practiced, what good is it? Biblical teaching on Sunday is good, but there is another step equally needed—an insistence that learners act out the teaching in their everyday lives. Titus was not to be wimpy in persuading believers to devote themselves to good works, which they already knew to do. Therefore Paul insisted that believers should be careful to devote themselves to good works because doing so is good and profitable for

everyone.

Following his point-blank demand in verse 8 regarding what Titus should do, Paul next pointed to actions Titus had to avoid and why. The original word translated avoid is a demand and means to void at all cost or step around. Titus was to avoid at all cost foolish debates, genealogies, quarrels, and disputes about the law. Jewish Christians were quick to school Gentile Christians in the finer points of Mosaic Law. Paul saw these things as a total waste of time, and even harmful to the body of believers.

Clearly Paul wanted the church at Crete to focus on what's most important—maintaining devotion to godliness. That's God's desire for *every* believer in the body of Christ. Training in godliness is not optional for believers. Belief and behavior walk hand in hand among all who walk with Christ.

### **Biblical Truths in Focus**

1. Commit to train yourself in godliness.
2. Develop a strategy for developing godliness in your life.
3. Devote yourself to good works. Make good works a lifestyle and not an occasional act.
4. God's people need to avoid arguing over minor things. Identify and focus on what matters most.
5. The gospel of Christ is the basis of godliness. One cannot live a godly life apart from a relationship with Christ and His Spirit living within.