

WHY DID THE APOSTLE PAUL HAVE A LOW OPINION OF PHYSICAL EXERCISE?

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1 Timothy 4:8: Paul States That Bodily Exercise Profiteth Little, My Personal Exercise Regimen, Some Advantages Of Exercise, The Brevity Of Human Life, God Decides The Number Of Our Days, Olympics: The Greeks And Romans Worshipped The Human Form, Devilish Man Worship, Temptations Of Pride And Vanity, Biblical Warnings Regarding Pride, Be Humble Before God, Paul's Teachings Agreed With Jesus, Flesh Profiteth Nothing, Apostle Paul Kept His Eyes On The Eternal Kingdom, The First Century Apostles Anticipated Christ's Soon Return, Transformation Of Our Physical Bodies, First Century People Walked Everywhere, Lazy Modern Society, Apostle Paul Did Not Outright Prohibit Exercise, Suggested Articles Reading List

In his first Epistle written to his beloved son in the faith, Timothy, the Apostle Paul writes as follows:

"For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

1 Timothy 4:8, KJV

For many years I pondered why the Apostle Paul would say that "bodily exercise profiteth little". After all, in our modern day, many health-conscious people realize that performing some type of exercise regimen on a regular basis can not only strengthen our body and improve our health, but it can likewise help us to extend our lives as well. In fact, personally, as some of you will already know, even at the current age of sixty-eight, while it is indeed both a mental and physical challenge for me, I perform a regular exercise regimen consisting of resistance training -- various dumbbell exercises -- and body weight exercises -- squats, push-ups, sit-ups, stairs -- about three times every week.

There is no denying that doing so has helped me a lot. For one thing, exercising keeps my body elastic so that I don't become stiff in my muscles and joints. A good exercise regimen also helps me to burn off the excess fat which many of us tend to acquire in our old age as our metabolism begins to slow down. Exercising regularly also lowers my cholesterol to a much safer level; and believe me, I am still working on that. There are undoubtedly other benefits as well which I am sure you can think of. So there are definitely good reasons for me to follow a good exercise routine. After all, I want to stick around on Planet Earth for as long as I possibly can, so that I can continue to share the Gospel with this lost and dying world.

Of course, as we all know, no matter how long we each live in Earth years, it is really nothing, and not even a drop in the bucket when we compare it to Eternity. We are each barely a spark and a very brief flash, if even that, in the light of Eternity. Thousands of years ago, the writers of the Holy Scriptures observed the very same thing. Thus, they penned verses such as the following:

"The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away."

Psalms 90:10, KJV

"Man is like to vanity: his days are as a shadow that passeth away."

Psalms 144:4, KJV

"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever."

Isaiah 40:7-8, KJV

"But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?"

Luke 12:20, KJV

"Then Jesus said unto them, My time is not yet come: but your time is always ready."

John 7:6, KJV

"And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:"

Hebrews 9:27, KJV

"Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye [ought] to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that."

James 4:14-15, KJV

"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."

1 Peter 1:23-25, KJV

While many modern people like to attribute their long lives to doing or not doing certain things -- such as not smoking, drinking or taking drugs; or eating certain foods while at the same time refraining from eating other foods; or taking a regimen of vitamin supplements; or engaging in a regular exercise routine -- ultimately, it is God the Father alone who determines our number of years upon the Earth. When He says that it is our time to go, well, it is our time to go, and there isn't much that we can do about it.

Yet still, taking into consideration all of the previous good reasons regarding why it is a smart idea to devote at least some amount of time in our busy lives to exercise, what could have possibly motivated the Apostle Paul to write to Timothy and suggest the exact opposite, by telling him that bodily exercise profits us little? What did Paul mean by that?

Well, consider the following possibility. It is common knowledge that the Greeks and the Romans were very much into sports events, worship of the human form, etc. My gosh, even the original Olympic Games -- which were held every four years in Olympia -- began with the Greeks. But one thing

about sports, is that when a person excels at them, the end result is that it often feeds their pride and vanity, which from a Biblical perspective is simply not good. Such people become lifted up in pride and begin to glorify themselves, their own bodies, and their own abilities, instead of God above. It is man worship, and the worship of the flesh, which is the way of the Devil, and the way of the world.

In fact, it might interest you to know that the Scriptures have absolutely nothing positive to say regarding human pride. The entire Bible, from beginning to end, beginning with the prideful fall of Adam and Eve, and ending with the rise of the prideful Beast of the Book of Revelation who all the world worships, is a stiff warning regarding the danger we face when we choose to yield to pride in our lives. Our Heavenly Father demands that we remain humble, submissive and meek in our lives. What a far cry from the way the world is today. God's standard of humility becomes rather evident by Bible verses such as the following:

"The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts."
Psalm 10:4, KJV

"The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate."
Proverbs 8:13, KJV

"When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom."
Proverbs 11:2, KJV

"Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom."
Proverbs 13:10, KJV

"In the mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride: but the lips of the wise shall preserve them."
Proverbs 14:3, KJV

"The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility."
Proverbs 15:33, KJV

"Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit

before a fall. Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud."

Proverbs 16:18-19, KJV

"A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit."

Proverbs 29:23, KJV

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Matthew 11:28-30, KJV

"At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

Matthew 18:1-4, KJV

"And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them, When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Luke 14:7-11, KJV

"But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble . . . Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up."

James 4:6, 10, KJV

"Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder.
Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed
with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace
to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty
hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:"
1 Peter 5:5-6, KJV

"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and
the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the
Father, but is of the world."
1 John 2:16, KJV

So when we look at things from that perspective, and realize
how fleshly accomplishments and glorifying the flesh can in
fact lift us up in pride, which in turn places us in direct
opposition to the Lord's standard, we can begin to better
understand why Paul may have possibly made that statement to
Timothy regarding bodily exercise. Aside from that, physical
exercise is simply of no benefit in a spiritual sense.

Something else to consider is the fact that the Apostle Paul
often paraphrased Jesus' own teachings. In fact, as I have
mentioned in previous articles, most of what Paul writes in
his Epistles comes directly from Jesus. In other words, Paul
confirms everything that Jesus said and taught in the four
Gospels. Personally, I've yet to find a single contradiction
in Paul's writings. Well, as you may know, one of the things
which Jesus said in the Gospel of John was the following:

"It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth
nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit,
and they are life."
John 6:63, KJV

In the previous verse, the word "quickeneth" is derived from
a Koine Greek word which means to give life. So clearly
then, Jesus emphasized the importance of the eternal spirit
over the temporal nature of the flesh which eventually ages,
dies and decays. The KJV Bible refers to this decay as
"corruption", as is evidenced, for example, in the following
verse:

"He [King David] seeing this before spake of the
resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell,
neither his flesh did see corruption."

Acts 2:31, KJV

So Jesus taught that the flesh profits nothing, while the Apostle Paul wrote that bodily exercise profits little. Do you see that direct connection? From reading his Epistles, we know that the Apostle Paul was of the very same mindset as Jesus. His eyes were on eternity, and on the Kingdom of God, and not on the Earth and the temporary things of the flesh. Thus, Paul wrote verses such as the following ones:

"While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

2 Corinthians 4:18, KJV

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."

Colossians 3:1-2, KJV

"No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier."

2 Timothy 2:4, KJV

"And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away."

1 Corinthians 7:31, KJV

This very same sentiment is expressed by Paul in 1 Timothy 4:8 -- the verse with which I first began this article -- with the words "and of that which is to come." The word "that" is referring to Eternal Life and our future life in the Kingdom of God. So in that verse where Paul mentions bodily exercise, he is actually contrasting the temporary life of the flesh and the Eternal Life of the Spirit, and telling his readers which is the more important of the two.

But there is more. In addition to all of the above, I came to the realization that the Christians of the latter half of the First Century were anticipating the soon return of Jesus Christ at any moment, at which time their bodies would be miraculously transformed, and they would all be translated to the Heavenly Realm. This point becomes quite evident in a

number of the Epistles which were written by Paul and other New Testament writers. One good example of this mentality is found in 1 Corinthians 15 where Paul concludes by writing as follows:

"Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

1 Corinthians 15:51-53, KJV

Following are some additional very inspiring verses regarding the bodily transformation which we will all experience one of these days. I hope that you enjoy reading them, and that they give you the heavenly vision:

"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:"

Romans 6:4-5, KJV

"For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren."

Romans 8:29, KJV

"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life."

2 Corinthians 5:1-4, KJV

"Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."

Philippians 3:21, KJV

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

1 John 3:2, KJV

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18, KJV

So, again, it becomes very evident that Paul and other New Testament writers very much had their eyes on the Kingdom of Heaven and the Eternal Life of the Spirit which they had been promised. Their eyes were not on the flesh and the temporary things of this world. They anticipated Christ's return when He would fulfill His word to them. Thus, given that mentality, perspective and expectation, bodily exercise would indeed seem pointless and futile to Paul and other First Century writers, wouldn't it?

There is something else we should consider here. Obviously, two thousand years ago, people did not have our modern modes of transportation; meaning cars, trucks, vans, buses, planes, motorcycles and the like. Yes, they had ships; but when it came to crossing large stretches of land, unless one was rich enough to own beasts of burden such as camels, horses, donkeys and such, it meant walking from place to place. Lots of walking -- sometimes over very rough terrain -- for miles and miles. In other words, I would venture to say that most people of the First Century were probably in very good shape physically from doing all of that walking. So would bodily exercise even be necessary?

In contrast, in today's world, particularly in the Western world, many of us lead very sedentary lives. My gosh, we have become so lazy, and so dependent on our vehicles, that we will even drive to the store, even if it is located only a block away. Are you guilty of doing this? Or maybe we work in an office job where we sit for hours on end. Add to that

the terribly fattening diet that many of us consume, and yes, it becomes rather obvious that we do need to exercise!

On a final note, please notice that in 1 Timothy 4:8, Paul does not outright say that we should not exercise. Neither does he outright condemn the practice. He simply expresses his view that it seems unprofitable, considering that they expected to be transformed and translated into God's Kingdom in the near future upon Christ's return. So why bother with grooming and exercising the flesh which would soon be left behind like an empty shell?

With these thoughts, I will bring this article to a close. It is my hope that you have found it informative, enlightening, and I pray that it has been a blessing in your life as well. If you have an account with Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr or with any other social network, I would really appreciate if you'd take the time to click or tap on the corresponding link that is found on this page. Thanks so much, and may God bless you abundantly!

For additional information and further study, you may want to refer to the list of reading resources below which were either mentioned in this article, or which contain topics which are related to this article. All of these articles are likewise located on the Bill's Bible Basics web server. To read these articles, simply click or tap on any link you see below.

Are You Saved and Sealed and Healed and Filled?

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Message to the World

One From Beyond: Hebrew of Hebrews

Salvation is Free Through Jesus Christ

Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God

Sluggards and Sloths: Are You Diligent and Faithful in the Affairs of God

So You Really Think You Are So Humble?

Strangers and Pilgrims: Are You an Alien?

Study, Work and Don't Be Ashamed

The Heavenly Vision: Have You Got It?

This Little Light, Glory of the Lord and Our Bright Future

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