

1 Timothy 4:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

For bodily exercise profiteth little (ἢ γὰρ σωματικὴ γυμνασία πρὸς ὄλιγον ἔστιν ὡφέλιμος, hē gar sōmatikē gymnasia pros oligon estin ὄphelimos)—'bodily training is profitable for a little.' Pros oligon can mean 'for a little while' (temporary benefit) or 'in limited ways' (restricted value). Physical fitness has genuine but limited value—it benefits this life only.

But godliness is profitable unto all things (ἢ δὲ εὐσέβεια πρὸς πάντα ὡφέλιμός ἔστιν, hē de eusebeia pros panta ὄphelimos estin)—'godliness is beneficial for all things.' **Having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come** (ἐπαγγελίαν ἔχουσα ζωῆς τῆς νῦν καὶ τῆς μελλούσης, epangelian echousa zōēs tēs nyn kai tēs mellousēs)—it has promise for present and future life.

Paul doesn't condemn physical exercise but relativizes it. In a culture obsessed with gymnasium training, he insists spiritual training has far greater payoff—it benefits both present earthly life (peace, joy, wisdom, relationships) and eternal life (rewards, fellowship with God). Invest your energy where returns are eternal.

Historical Context

Greek culture centered on the gymnasium, where men trained naked for athletic competitions. Physical fitness was highly valued in Greco-Roman society, tied to honor and civic virtue. Paul uses this cultural value to illustrate a greater truth:

spiritual training produces benefits that outlast the body. While physical training prepares for temporal contests, godliness prepares for eternal realities.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How can Christians value physical health without making fitness an idol?
2. What does 'training in godliness' look like practically—what are the spiritual disciplines?
3. In what specific ways does godliness benefit both present and future life?

Interlinear Text

ἡ γὰρ σωματικὴ γυμνασία πρὸς ὄλιγον ἔστιν
G3588 **For** **bodily** **exercise** **little** G3641 **is**
G1063 G4984 G1129 G4314 G2076

ἀφέλιμός ἡ δὲ εὐσέβεια πρὸς πάντα ὀφέλιμός ἔστιν
G5624 G3588 **profitable** **but** **godliness** **little** **all things** **profitable** **is**
G1161 G2150 G4314 G3956 G5624 G2076

ἐπαγγελίαν ἔχουσα ζωῆς τῆς νῦν καὶ τῆς
G1860 **promise** **having** **of the life** G3588 **that now is** **and** G3588
G2192 G2222 G3568 G2532

μελλούσης
of that which is to come
G3195

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 6:33 (References God): But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

1 Timothy 6:6 (References God): But godliness with contentment is great gain.

Proverbs 19:23 (Parallel theme): The fear of the LORD tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil.

Proverbs 22:4 (Parallel theme): By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honour, and life.

Psalms 37:11 (Parallel theme): But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

Psalms 37:29 (Parallel theme): The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever.

1 John 2:25 (Covenant): And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.

Mark 10:30 (Parallel theme): But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.

Hebrews 13:9 (Parallel theme): Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.

Isaiah 3:10 (Parallel theme): Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings.