

DIVIDENDS GUARANTEED

"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." I Timothy 4:8.

Paul was a man of adventurous spirit. He was not an athlete, but everything athletic had for him a great charm. From the athletic contests he drew many of the most telling and thrilling illustrations of the Christian life. He urged an equivalent in the lives of young people which would match their heroic devotions in the arena or on the race course. Since life is a great game, if one is to play it successfully, he must prepare for it and then conform to the rules which regulate the game. Every athlete knows that the secret of success is largely in the training.

Christianity has been and is the greatest contributor to civilization. Churches have been and are the chief factors in expressing, interpreting and propagating Christian principles. Christianity is an appeal to common sense. It asks our acknowledgment on the ground of enlightened self-interest. Living out Christian principles helps the progress of the individual, the community, the state, the nation and the world.

There are those who would contend that godliness is useless. Frequently an honest man sees a dishonest one pass him in the race of life. Often a person attempting to practice the Christian virtues of kindness, patience and forgiveness will meet those who take advantage of him because he does. A faithful Christian contacts those who make no profession of religion, and they appear to get along just as well. That is why he is tempted to ask, "Is the struggle worth-while? Does it pay to be a Christian?" Through the centuries people have asked the question, "Will it pay?" In our day this is a very common question. Our modern life is geared to profit and loss. Transactions are made after the parties concerned have convinced themselves that it is to their advantage. Men halt at the threshold of their undertakings, enterprises and investments and ask this pertinent question, "Will it pay?" This question is raised by all classes. We want to know if we will get a fair return for the thought, time, strength and material.

At the threshold of the greatest of all investments, let us pause and ask, "Does it pay to be a Christian?" Paul considered the Christian life from the standpoint of the profit involved. After some twenty years in the Christian life, Paul asked himself, "Has my Christian life been a paying investment?" Then he answered his question in these memorable words, "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" (I Timothy 4:8). He admitted that there is some profit in physical exercise, but much more profit in spiritual exercise. If bodily exercise "profiteth little," then exercising oneself unto godliness profits much more.

I. Godliness Pays In The Life That Now Is.

1. Godliness pays physically.

This does not mean that being a Christian will drive rheumatism from the joints and poison from the blood. Godliness will not straighten crooked limbs or repair defective teeth. It will not heal diseases or restore a shattered organism to perfect health. But ordinarily a Christian will live longer and be happier, because he lives a clean life and possesses a peace of mind unknown to the world.

More than anything else sin undermines physical health. The Bible says, "Fear the Lord and depart from evil: it shall be health to thy navel and marrow to thy bones." The promise here is that bodily health will be the direct reward of godliness. Officials in all insurance companies know that right living tends to lengthen life and therefore makes the subject a better risk for insurance. Godliness not only helps one physically, but it will also tell upon one's offspring. Medical science confirms the teaching of the Bible that "the sins of the father are visited upon the children even to the third and fourth generation." Therefore, one lives in at least four generations.

Godliness is very helpful to the disposition. It both makes one easier to live with and sweetens old age. Who are the happiest old people whom you know? They are not the ones who have opposed God in their lives, or have lived for themselves. They are the ones who have practiced godliness. They are the ones who have heeded the injunction of Bryant:

"So live, that when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan, which moves
To that mysterious realm, where each shall take
His chamber in the silent halls of death,
Thou go not, like the quarry-slayer at night,
Scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave,
Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams."

2. Godliness pays financially.

Sin costs more than anything. If all people were godly, we could abolish police forces, court costs, penal institutions and public almshouses, and thereby save tremendous sums of money.

Godliness contributes to sound finance and economy. Many Christians have developed habits of industry and economy which have enabled them to enter upon careers of temporal prosperity. They are largely indebted to the grace of God for the material blessings of life. Best of all, the Christian has a clean heart and a clear conscience which enable him to enjoy and appreciate the good things he has earned by his toil and faithfulness.

Godliness encourages frugality. It inculcates high standards of living--industry, thrift, honesty, purity and compassion. All of these virtues are real assets to one in the life that now is. The banks, the offices, the business firms, the educational institutions and the pulpits are not looking for drunkards and debauchees. Every inquiry of reference, where one has made application for a position, wants to know about the applicants honesty, industry, sobriety, manner of life, attitude and willingness to cooperate.

3. Godliness pays mentally.

The devout and praying man, who desires to know God's mind and to have revealed unto him God's will, in order that he may conform thereto to the limit of his ability, reaches heights which the ungodly and prayerless man never reaches at all. A man who is right with God and godly in his living takes the proper attitude toward broken plans, or whatever comes and goes.

Godliness gives one the abiding comfort of an ever-present Companion and Guide. On Boston Commons stands the statue of Phillips Brooks. Beside the great preacher is a statue of the Christ of the ages, Who called this great man into service and so marvelously used his great talents. The hidings of the power of Phillips Brooks are revealed by the sculptor. It was the companionship of Christ. This is the need of all of us, and is the obtainable boon and blessing in reach of all of us.

Many years ago, a distinguished lawyer in Indianapolis departed this life. At that time Benjamin Harrison, who later became the twenty-third president of the United States, was a member of the bar in that city, and he was asked to deliver an address at the funeral service. When he arose to speak to the lawyers, and others, assembled there, he said: "Gentlemen of the bar: Last night I was awakened by my little daughter who had arisen from her bed and made her way across the room and was stroking my face with her chubby hands. When I asked her what she

wanted, she said, 'Papa, in the great big dark of the night I am lonely and afraid unless I can touch you.' Gentlemen, in the great big dark of the world's night of life's bereavement, we are afraid unless we can reach out and touch God." The ever-present companionship of Christ gives us sustaining comfort for every hour of life.

Christianity makes life better and happier. It cleanses the life and points the pathway to harmony with God's will. Some one said that "the maximum achievement of any man's life, after it is all over, is to have done the will of God." This is the supreme thing in life.

This profit from godliness may be experienced in the present. With great satisfaction many Christians have discovered that Christianity is first of all for the here and now. How readily though so many take their minds off the present! While we are young, we daydream about the future. As we grow older, we reminisce about the past. Young people long to be older, and old people long to be young again. Far too many want to live in the past.

To complain about the present is a perennial and universal human malady. Yet, complaining about the times never does anyone any good, and never solves a single problem. Instead of complaining, we should do our very best to correct the things that are wrong. We are witnessing a God-dishonoring rash of criticism and complaint about too many things in the present. When were the times ever just right for accomplishing any great task? Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "All times are good if we just knew what to do with them." Hard times prevailed in 1776, but it was out of such times that God produced men like George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and a host of others.

The present can and should be filled with fascinating and fruitful activities. The study of spiritual truth can be so profitable. Dr. William Lyon Phelps said, "I would rather have a knowledge of the Bible without a college education than to have a college education without a knowledge of the Bible. Life conditioned and governed by the eternal truths of God's Word is profitable.

Godliness is profitable in all areas of the life that now is. In whatever field a man may work, if he is a godly Christian, he is far more effective. Is he a doctor? Then his impact on humanity is more telling if he practices medicine for the glory of the Great Physician. Is he a lawyer? Then he is a more useful one if he practices law for the glory of the Great Advocate. Is he a merchant? a mechanic? a scientist? Then he is a much better one in proportion to his loyalty to the Lord.

Godliness blesses any area of life. "In the home it is kindness. In business it is honesty. In society it is courtesy. In work it is thoughtfulness. In play it is fairness. To the unfortunate it is pity. To the weak it is help. To the wicked it is resistance."

II. Godliness Pays In The Life That Is To Come.

When the hour of death comes, it will make all the difference whether or not one has been a Christian. It will be far better to go like President McKinley, singing, "Nearer My God To Thee," than to go like the noted infidel who cried, "Oh God, if there be a God, have mercy on my soul." It will be much better to go like Dwight L. Moody who said, "Earth is receding; heaven is opening; I am going home," than to go like another infidel who cried, "I am taking a fearful leap in the dark." Other things may seem important to you now, but, when the hour of death comes, godliness will be the thing that counts most.

On June 6, 1799, Patrick Henry, the great patriot of colonial times, lay dying. The physician came and examined him and then said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Henry, but there is nothing that I can do for you." Patrick Henry said, "Doctor, do you mean that I must die?" The physician said, "Yes, Mr. Henry, you are about to die." Patrick Henry said, "Doctor, if you will get yonder chair and place it beside my bed and sit here, I will show you how a Christian can die."

When the aunt of Gipsy Smith was dying, she called Gipsy to her bedside and said, "Gipsy, I want you to tell the world that I have found Jesus to be a rock in a weary land, a shelter in the time of storm, and tell the people that He does not forsake His followers when the hour of death is upon them." When one contemplates the death of a Christian, he is reminded of the revealing words of Wesley concerning the death of Christians when he said, "Our people die well." Yes, godliness pays in the gloom of the valley of shadows.

"'Tis religion that can give
Sweetest pleasures while we live,
'Tis religion must supply
Solid comfort when we die."

Godliness will pay in the life that is to come. One age-long question of mortal lips has ever been, "What lies beyond the sunset?" Christ answered this question in these immortal words, "My Father's House." Godliness is a guarantee of peace and glory in the life which is to come. Through Christ we have the forgiveness of sins, peace of conscience, joy of heart, satisfaction of soul and the assurance of a home in heaven. Through Him we have the supply of every need in this present world and all of the blessings and joys in the world to come. Truly, godliness is profitable.

"It pays to serve Jesus, It pays every day,
It pays every step of the way;
Though the pathway to glory may sometimes be drear,
You'll be happy each step of the way."