

DOES IT PAY TO BE A CHRISTIAN?

"But exercise thyself unto godliness: for bodily exercise is profitable for a little; but godliness is profitable for everything, having promise of life, of that which is now and of that which is coming." I Timothy 4:7b-8.

Paul, the writer of this letter to his son in the gospel, was a man of adventurous spirit. He was not an athlete, but everything athletic had for him a great charm. As he had watched the gladiators, athletes, and runners in their contests, their sports had a charm for him, and he drew from them many of the most telling and thrilling illustrations of Christian life. He tried to urge an equivalent in the life of young people which would match the heroic devotions of man on the battlefield, in the arena, and in a marathon race. To put it in the phraseology of Paul, life is a great game, and if one is to play the game he must remember the preparation that is necessary and the laws which govern the game. In the text the Apostle admonishes that we "train for the religious life." Every athlete knows that the secret of success is largely in the training.

Christianity is and has ever been the chiefest contributor to civilization. Churches are and have always been 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. Does living up to and living out Christian principles help or hinder the progress of the individual, the city, the state, the nation, and the world?

There are many forces at work in the world which would try to persuade men of the uselessness and vanity of godliness in the Christian life. The man who deals honestly not infrequently will see a dishonest man, a shyster, or a crook pass him in the race of life. The man who makes an effort to practice the Christian virtues of kindness and patience and forgiveness will meet with those who take advantage of him because he practices these virtues. The Christian believer who tries to keep up the life of worship and of prayer comes daily in contact with multitudes who look upon the whole thing as a joke, an absurdity, who disregard the unseen world entirely and who seem to get along just as well without professing religion. Thus men are tempted to say to themselves, "Is the struggle worth while; does it pay to be a Christian?"

People in all ages have asked the question, "Will it pay?" In our age this is the most common of all questions. Men halt at the threshold of every undertaking, every enterprise, and every investment and ask this pertinent question. This question is raised by the student, the mechanic, the merchant, the professional man, the banker, the farmer -- yea, by all classes. We all question whether we will get a fair return for the thought, time, strength, and material.

Let us pause at the threshold of the greatest of all undertakings, the most vital of all investments, and reverently ask, "Does it pay to be a Christian?" This is not the most weighty consideration in favor of a person accepting Christ and living the Christian life. Among the higher motives for such an act we may mention the marvelous love of God, a profound desire to have divine help in building a noble life, a sincere longing to be of the greatest possible service to others, etc. Nevertheless, it is permissible, helpful, and inspiring to consider the Christian life from the stand point of the profit involved. Paul did this very thing. After twenty years in the Christian life, Paul paused and asked, "Has my Christian life been a paying investment?" He answers his question in the memorable words, "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come." The conclusion Paul reached is the same that has been reached by every person who has ever given the Christian life a fair trial. In translating our text into modern speech, Dr. Moffatt makes it read, "Religion is of service in all directions; it contains the promise of life, both for the present and for the future."

There are four great facts with which mortals must reckon. These are inescapable facts and they cannot be pushed aside.

1. The fact of God.

Every mortal must reckon with Him. Some one asked Victor Hugo why Napoleon failed at Waterloo. He answered in one word, "God." The book of Jonah is an extremely interesting book. One fact with which Jonah had to reckon was God. God speaks the last word about life, and death, and the boundless tomorrow.

2. The fact of the soul.

Man is a mystery to himself. He is baffled by the very fact of life. The voice of instinct, of reason, of nature, of Christian testimony, and of Divine Revelation convincingly declare that there is more to life than what we see and know in this little journey we take here in this world. Man faces the fact that there is within him something that must live on and on forever.

3. The fact of death.

How deep and baffling and painful is this tragedy we call death. Think of the tears it has brought, the homes it has broken, the graves it has made. Think of all it has done for man's fondest hopes and most alluring life's plans. When we have begun to learn to live, we must die.

4. The fact of judgment.

"So then every one of us must give an account of himself to God." "It is appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgment." It is well, then, to reckon with this fact as we face every decision and every deed of life.

Sometime ago a man told of how he had tried to be an infidel, but he said that there were three things that held him.

- (1) "I am a man going somewhere. I do not know exactly where I am going, but I know that I am nearer to that destination now than I have ever been. When I contemplate the fact of God, and death, and eternity, I find nothing in the philosophy of the infidel that offers any comfort."
- (2) "I saw my companion go down into death. I noticed that she approached the mystic and sullen stream in full confidence. I saw her lean on an unseen arm, and pillow her head on an unseen bosom, and go to sleep like a child. I have not read anything in infidel literature which prepares one to die as she died."
- (3) "I have three motherless daughters. I am both father and mother to them. If the religion of Jesus Christ is not a reality, and if the infidel's philosophy is true, I had rather make three trips to the cemetery and place them in three little graves beside that mother's grave, than to leave them to live on in a world such as infidel philosophy would make."

I. It pays to be a Christian in this life.

1. It pays physically.

This does not mean that being a Christian will heal diseases, restore a shattered organism to perfect health, or immediately correct evil hereditary influences. It will simply lead to an observance of the fundamental laws of hygiene. By conforming to these principles one will have pure blood, stronger muscles, fairer cuticle, brighter eye, and clearer brain. More than any other agency, sin undermines physical health. Doesn't the scripture say, "Fear the Lord and depart from evil: it shall be health to thy navel and marrow to thy bones." The promise there is that bodily health shall be the direct reward of godliness. Right living not only helps one physically, but it will also tell upon one's offspring.

2. It pays financially.

The principles of godliness contribute to sound finance and economy. Sin costs more than anything else. If all people were godly, we could abolish police forces, penal institutions, public almshouses, court hosts, etc., and thus reduce taxes. Many Christian men 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.

3. It pays mentally

Christianity 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 is 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 died in Indianapolis. 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 group of 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 night of life's bereavement, we are afraid unless we can reach out and touch God." The ever-present companionship of Jesus gives sustaining comfort for every hour of life.

The religion of Jesus Christ 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. The Christian believer knows the secret of a happy and useful life. Right Christian living tends to sweeten old age. The happiest old people are not those who have opposed God in life, nor those who have lived for self, but those who, as Bryant puts it,

"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-slave 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."

II. It pays to be a Christian when death comes.

On June 6, 1799, Patrick Henry, great patriot of Colonial times, lay dying. The physician came and examined his patient and said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Henry, but there is nothing 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, the religion of Jesus 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."

III. It pays to be a Christian in the life to come.

We are on the border-land of a great mystery here. One age-long question of mortal lips has ever been --- "What lies beyond the sunset?" Jesus answered in these words --- "My Father's House." Godliness has the promise and the assurance of the life which is to come, a life of glory, of beauty, and of peace. "Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." Through Christ we have peace of conscience, joy of heart, and the hope of heaven; the supply of every need in this present world and life everlasting in the world to come. Yes, it pays to be a Christian.

"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."