

Scriptures and Doctrine :: Godly Gymnastics

Godly Gymnastics - posted by PaulWest (), on: 2008/1/26 12:38

Godly Gymnastics

"...exercise thyself rather unto godliness." (I Tim. 4:7)

Saints, there comes a point in a believer's life where God begins to require an active and deliberate effort on the Christian's behalf if he or she is to continue to grow in grace and greater maturity. This principle is taught throughout Holy Scripture and is not to be confused with Paul's warning to the Galatian church of juxtaposing flesh and spirit (Gal. 3:3). The word "exercise" used in this KJV passage is translated from a Greek word from which we get the term "gymnasium" - **gumnazo** - and is aptly translated as "train" in the NLT: "...train yourself to be godly."

While I was meditating on this passage of Scripture yesterday, I began to get a picture of a master gymnast training for the Olympics. I took notice of his diet, his sleeping schedule, his daily routine. I saw him on the crossbars, the chalk on his hands, the determination in his eyes. At one point, I saw him slip during his training and fall to the ground, only to slowly get up, brush off his hands and look back up to the bar and make his leap again. I saw him get up early in the mornings, heading to the gym with his dufflebag over his shoulder. And I also saw him during times of needed repose, stepping back from the gym for awhile to give his fatigued muscles a chance to heal and get strong. Suddenly, a whole plethora of Scripture came to me, and I grabbed a scratch pad and quickly jotted down some verses.

Brethren, the truth is there is a degree of labor involved when we determine to "run the race" and go for the "crown". If we are going to enter the race, we must do it lawfully and with all diligence, and there are rules to adhere to and guidelines to follow if we are to facilitate and maximize to the utmost potential our times of "exercise" in the gym.

"For bodily exercise profiteth little, but godliness is profitable unto all things" (I Tim. 4:8). Here we see that Paul is referring not to the exercising that profits physical mass, but to the furthering of godliness - a practice that requires an exercise of mind and heart under the coaching of the Holy Spirit. This verse is translated from the same Greek root of "gumnazo" as the preceding verse. Paul goes on to say, *"Therefore we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God" (I Tim. 4:10).* We need to see that trusting in God goes hand-in-hand with labor; we will labor and exercise and train ourselves unto godliness *because* we trust in God and not in ourselves. If we trusted in ourselves, we would trust in the veneer of our own strength and see no need to discipline our bodies and minds after godliness. The Olympic athlete trains the way he does *because* he doesn't trust in himself! He knows that in his natural state, without training, his present strength is hardly acceptable and worthy of any medal. He trusts in his trainer, his coach, his diet, and the physical requirements and repetitions. His personal trainer and the exercise regiment prescribed are his god and law, but for the gymnast in God, the labor is one of love, the diet is the Word, the trainer is the Holy Ghost, and the strength is Christ's.

When the gymnast faithfully, assiduously, dutifully, and lawfully follows his exercise regiment, he begins to see progression in his agility. He has the strength to maneuver the parallel bars in ways he couldn't before. For the gymnastic child of God, newfound strength is suddenly acquired to *"...cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God"* and also to *"bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ"* (II Cor. 10:5). Casting down high and exalted things requires as much strength in the spiritual as lifting oneself up on a highbeam to perform gymnastic feats requires strength in the physical.

For the godly gymnast, there is a degree of labor involved in the feat of meditation, a labor which must come from the fruit of a disciplined and trained and agile mind. The conscience must also be pure and alert. A lazy mind will not "cook" the meat of God's Word, and "eat the scroll", as it is happily content to watch the godly compete from a distance, as a spectator on television. The man who is diligent in mind about the things of God, however, will have his meat as a "precious substance" (Proverbs 12:27), cooked and digestible. His diet will fuel his work-out routine. The lazy, laborless man looks on with admiration at the strong athletes, wanting their strength, but not willing to undergo the discipline and exercise required to do what they do (Proverbs 13:4). Many a potential contender has been beguiled and swerved away from a serious training routine by the glitter and false promises of a "strength without exercise" get-rich scheme (Proverbs 13:11). They may acquire an air of quality athleticism without labor, but such is only a temporary burst of adrenaline, and when the display is over the body goes back to its sluggish shape and despondent disposition. Only genuine muscle proves the fire beneath the smoke, and such muscle only comes about through exercise.

Christians like to discuss rigorous work-out plans, and the gymnasts who, in the past, treaded the paths of victory like glorious Olympic stars, not fully realizing that such talk without labor only leads to poverty (Proverbs 14:23). They may sleep soundly, unhampered by sore muscles and the tedious trials of strength, but in exchange for their painless preoccupations, they go to bed and wake up hungry (Proverbs 19:15). This is especially sad, as all the food they need to survive in God's gymnasium is fully accessible - even in their hands - yet, their laziness has grown to such an extent that they won't even lift it to their mouths (Proverbs 19:24).

As with all vigorous exercise routines, there are effective guidelines to maximize results. The expert gymnast well knows the importance of rest, and how muscles must be given time to heal and transform from the stretching in the gym. To continue, day by day by day on the parallel bars without ceasing could have detrimental results. Any weightlifter knows the futility of curling a heavy weight too many times in repetition, for, instead of gaining instant strength, his strength actually gets weaker and weaker. By not allowing a time of rest, he would eventually reach muscle failure and not even be able to lift a feather. We see this principle in eating also. At some point, the eater must stop ingesting and give his body time to begin digesting. The gymnastic routine is good, eating is good, honey is good (Proverbs 24:13), but too much of a good thing - that is, violating the law of balance and moderation - can quickly become a bad thing (Proverbs 25:16). Many potential gymnasts have burnt themselves out by too much time in the gym and not enough time in repose. Their scripture-stuffed, over-strained minds gradually became a liability and an injury occurred. Now these injured athletes are afraid of returning to the gymnasium! Lifting a heavy weight properly and lawfully can make you healthy and strong, but with improper technique it can slip and injure you...even kill you. Many cult masterminds were once - and still are - ardent crossbeam navigators, though they now compete under the enemy's flag at Olympic events.

Brethren, let us therefore exercise with the wisdom of God. From the words of a master gymnast worthy of our emulation: *"All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will not fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified"* (1 Cor. 9:27 NLT)

Brother Paul

Re: Godly Gymnastics - posted by crsschk (), on: 2008/1/27 11:37

Very good analogy brother. Somehow or another can't but help draw back to ... this opponent that is ever present. The living dead man if I could put it that way. Keep coming back to Paul's wretched man and that corpse chained to the body that is alluded to. It's just a musing and even some conjecture ... How does this fit into the analogy?

Re: - posted by PaulWest (), on: 2008/1/27 16:18

Quote:

-----Somehow or another can't but help draw back to ... this opponent that is ever present.

The archwar between flesh and spirit, brother. The flesh would prevent prayer, prevent any sort of training that would benefit the spirit, any kind of exercising unto godliness.

Quote:

----- The living dead man if I could put it that way. Keep coming back to Paul's wretched man and that corpse chained to the body that is alluded to.

Yes, this adversary is unavoidable. The "old man", as Paul puts it, is indeed dead, crucified and buried with Christ. The difference now is that outside influences are still able to incite our unmortified flesh via the ears, eyes, etc. The enemy is now outside trying to get in, attempting to penetrate our senses and thoughts by cleverly aimed "fiery darts" and strategically placed objects of temptation ready to explode upon proximity. I think it's very important we understand that the enemy is *outside the gates*, as opposed to before, when we were in our unconverted state with the "old man" living in us. The "spirit of the world" is now outside the born-again believer - the same spirit that worked in us while we were the "children of disobedience." The "old man" is crucified dead, and a "new man" now lives in us, fashioned and quickened by and of God.

. This new man, however, now strives now against a trinity of opposition: the world, flesh and devil.

This is why Paul exhorted the Ephesian church to stand strong in the armor of God. Armor protects a body from outside penetrations that would otherwise prove fatal. Shields are used to deflect injurious objects. The old man is dead, the enemy is *outside*, and the new man must wear the spiritual armor of God to prevent outside elements from entering and reigning in our bodies.

This is why it would be ridiculous to tell an unconverted person to wear the armor of God; the old man is already living *within* any armor they might put on.

The enemy would try to persuade by "speaking" the language of our flesh, and tell us that we really don't need to exercise so much today, that we exercised enough yesterday - and our lazy, godless flesh is all too happy to acquiesce! The spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak, and our rebellious flesh doesn't want to get out of bed to train in the gymnasium of God.

Any thoughts?

Re: - posted by hmmhmm (), on: 2008/1/27 16:26

Quote:

PaulWest wrote:

The enemy would try to persuade by "speaking" the language of our flesh, and tell us that we really don't need to exercise so much today, that we exercised enough yesterday, and the lazy, godless flesh is all too happy to acquiesce. The spirit is willing, the flesh is weak, and the flesh doesn't want to get "out of bed" to train in the gymnasium of God.

Ron B said in one of his sermons, he listened to radio and they interviewed a world famous pianist. And the reporter asked

"how much do you train?"

he answered

"I train five hours every day"

and the reporter said "you must be joking? as good as you are you don't need five hours a day?"

he said "if I don't train for one day, I will know the difference, if I don't train for one week, my wife will know the difference, if I don't train for a month, my fans will know the difference"

just some thoughts.....

Christian

Re: - posted by PaulWest (), on: 2008/1/27 16:44

Quote:

-----just some thoughts

Excellent thoughts..

Quote:

-----if i dont train for one day, i will know the difference,

And it doesn't stop here; you may know the difference, but the enemy knows as well, and will do something to capitalize on your misfortune. Plans will begin to be drawn up.

Re: - posted by hmmhmm (), on: 2008/1/27 16:55

Quote:

PaulWest wrote:

This is why Paul exhorted the Ephesian church to stand strong in the armor of God. Armor protects a body from outside penetrations that would otherwise prove fatal. Shields are used to deflect injurious objects.

here is some more thoughts, i am reading Gurnalls brick, and something stood out to me, it all does but something stood really out to me.

"It is one thing to have amour in the house, and another thing to have it buckled on; to have grace in the principle, and grace in the act."

Re: - posted by ccchhrrriiisss (), on: 2008/1/27 17:10

Great thread and posts! This "gymnastics" anecdote (along with RonB's piano story) are very interesting.

:-)

Re: Godly Gymnastics - posted by Spitfire, on: 2008/1/28 7:36

I enjoyed reading through this thread and I pictured the whole scene, Paul, as you described the gymnast in training, heading out to the gym before daylight with the duffel bag over the shoulder. I, too, had many scriptures coming to my mind as I "watched" this scene which you painted. One, in particular, where the motivating thing which inspired Jesus to finish his task in Hebrews 12:2, "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

How can one do a thing so difficult which requires a daily push if one does not believe that there is a reward of acquiring the thing for which we strive... "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." Ahhhhh...the Gold Medal! Dian

Re: Godly Gymnastics - posted by PaulWest (), on: 2008/1/28 10:11

Quote:

-----At one point, I saw him slip during his training and fall to the ground, only to slowly get up, brush off his hands and look back up to the bar and make his leap again.

"For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again" (Proverbs 24:16).