

Mark 8: 34-38; “The Exercise Room of Christian Discipleship”,
Sermon # 64 in the series – “Astonished at His Teaching”,
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on July 3rd, 2016,
in the Morning Worship Service.

Today, I hope that you will be able to remember all that we have seen on the other two levels of the house of Christian discipleship, because I want you to go with me, now, downstairs to the lower level. We are going down to take a look at this room because I want you to understand that you and I need to attempt to do something with all the spiritual truth that we have been given by grace. You and I need to do something with all of the truth that we have been given, if we are going to glorify God with our life. There is a verse which I believe that we should turn to, so that we might understand what we are looking at here. It is 1st Timothy Chapter 4, and verses 7 and 8. “But reject profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise yourself towards godliness.” “For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.” “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance.” Take a look around you; you are in the Exercise Room. That spiritual flab has to go if you would be a strong Christian; willing to do exploits for our Lord and His kingdom. You may have come to know many good things from the Word of God, and yet if you do not exercise, all that good spiritual food will do you no good. God expects you to exercise yourself toward godliness. So, 1st of all, it is important to understand that there is something that you must reject in order to become strong as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Then 2nd – It is important to understand that Godliness is profitable for all things in this life. Then 3rd – It is important to understand that godliness brings with it, promise for the life to come. I hope that as you listen to me that you will pray and ask God to give you the grace that you will need in order to lay hold on that which is eternal life indeed.

1st of all - It is important to understand that there is something that you must reject in order to become strong as a disciple of Jesus Christ. (Verse 7)

“But reject profane and old wives fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness.” Now what is the Apostle talking about here, when he says, “profane and old wives fables”. I think that we can understand it if we will simply look at the context of these verses, and also look at some other verses from this letter that he is writing. The context is set, beginning at verse 1, where Paul is explaining to Timothy about some people who “give heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.” “Now the Spirit expressly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.” “For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.” “If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.”

Exercising yourself toward godliness, we find here, is related to the doctrines that you receive, and live by, and teach to others. If you teach or hold to false doctrine, then it will lead you to false worship and ungodly practices in your life; both in word and deed. The particular thing that Paul is warning about here, was related to the antichristian practice which was beginning to develop in the days of the apostles and reached its height in the visible Church of Rome in the days before the Reformation; of people listening to the false teaching that people should not marry. They were told by the Pope, the bishops, and the priests that if they would serve the Lord with all their heart, and all their strength, then they should be celibate, these false

teachers would say. This false doctrine has wreaked havoc in the Church all the way down through its history. You are supposedly more spiritual if you do not marry. It is plainly a false doctrine according to the Bible. "Marriage is honorable among all and the bed undefiled," it says in Hebrews 13: 4. It is fornicators and adulterers that God will judge. But the false teaching that people, if they wanted to be more spiritual, more holy, and more devoted to God, then they should not marry, actually has led many in the past, and many in our day to the place where they were secretly committing fornication and even homosexual practices. It is a false church which tells men who minister the Word of God, that they should not marry. Priests in the Roman Catholic church are instructed in this way, to take vows of celibacy. This kind of false thinking and reasoning began in Paul's day, and it is still with us today.

Another false doctrine that some within the visible Church were teaching; that was being propagated then, and is still spread around today, was that only certain foods were clean; and that if you abstained from certain foods, then you were becoming a more godly person. If you were a vegetarian you were more spiritual. If you abstained from eating meat during Lent, and only ate fish on Fridays, that somehow you were walking more closely with the Lord. But these kinds of doctrines and practices are termed here, "departing from the faith". Verse 4 says, "For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." The Word of God says that all foods that God has created are permissible for you to eat, when you are giving thanks for them. You must eat in moderation; certainly; and you must not fall into the sin of gluttony. You should be wise and reasonable about what you eat, but your abstaining from this food or that food does not make you more spiritual in any sense of the word. Do you give thanks for the food that you eat? You ought to do so, for it is an exercise in godliness. Your food comes to you because God provides you with it, whether you know it or not. It is ungodliness not to thank Him for it.

Eating your food in moderation, and not in gluttony, is a holy exercise of godliness if you are thankful for it; if you have a clear conscience in regard to eating it. Why? because the word of God tells you so. The words of the Lord Jesus declare it to be so. Jesus says in Mark chapter 7, verse 14: "Hear Me, everyone, and understand: there is nothing from outside which can defile a man; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man." He said to His disciples later, privately, "Are you without understanding also?" "Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?" In the NAS and the ESV it says, "And thus He declared all foods clean." You see, this verse is about your spiritual exercise, and it is set in the context of "profane and old wives' tales". It is people making up their own doctrines of what is right and wrong, and good and bad; calling these false practices godly, or calling them true religion, in relation to things eaten, and in relation to sexual things. All this is false, and it can lead many astray. God has declared what is right in the Word of God, but those who are simply trying to be religious make up something different from the clear statements of the word of God; and they do so, by the strength of their own observations.

But then they go further than this. By the persuasiveness of their own personality and words, they convince others that something is supposedly true, when it is not. They convince others to believe superstitions and lies about how God is to be worshiped and served. This kind of approach; a person's declaring their own opinions about God and what He is like, and what He expects, and how a person is saved, if it doesn't square with the Word of God, it should be seen as utterly false. True religion and true godliness is not a matter of your going to your friend, or someone who is popular, to hear the latest gossip or advice. True religion is not a church making up its own traditions and then nullifying the Word of God with them. If you are a true disciple of Jesus Christ, you will let the Word of God judge all things in regard to what you participate in. You will let the word of God inform you about what you are to do with your body,

or what you should pursue in the thoughts of your soul. Reject the profane and old wives' fables. You can see this also in 1 Timothy 1, verse 3, if you will turn there. "As I urged you when I went in Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith." "The purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desire to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm." "But we know the law is good if one uses it lawfully."

I hope that you understand, as I say these things, that the thing that you must reject, if you are to exercise yourself toward godliness, is your giving heed to fables that is; things which are not true to the reality of what God expects you to do. That is, God has certain things that He expects you to do, in relation to righteous thinking, in relation to the way that you think and the things that you do in His sight. "Blessed is the person who hears the word of God," Jesus says, "and does it." In other words, in order to be godly, you simply cannot spend most of your spare time reading, and watching, and paying attention to things which are made up by people who are trying to superimpose a make-believe reality upon the true reality which God has created. God expects you to interact with Him in relation to His book, the Bible. He is expecting you to interact with Him over everything that you are participating in, in your experience. If you respond to Him in faith, saying, Lord Jesus teach me your holy way, and give me the strength to do what you have commanded me to do; then you are truly His disciple.

This really is very important; that you begin to understand this, if you have not already. We are living in a media-driven age. And some of you may be spending large amounts of time paying attention to vain things, either on the computer or your phone, or through watching them on the television. I not saying it wrong to ever use these devices which everyone uses. I am saying that it is wrong if your participation in these things leads you to neglect interacting with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit over what you should be doing and pursuing at any given time. You could be doing this same thing, just as easily, by reading worldly novels or books, or spending all of your time in sports and recreations, and in the process you leave God out of your experience. You may not be pursuing having fellowship with Him. So, let me put it to you this way; if you find that you rarely pick up your Bible and read it so that you understand that it is God speaking to you in it, then you surely are not exercising yourself unto godliness. If you are more interested in paying attention to worldly things and the pursuits of worldly people, you have placed yourself in great danger spiritually. And so, you should know, and receive this truth at this very hour; you are not really following Christ in the way that you should be, if you are living in this way. You are wasting away the precious time that God has given to you, which you do not have to waste. And if you are really a Christian, you will greatly regret it later, if you do not wake up to see it now. Do you not understand that in order to exercise yourself toward godliness that you are going to have to deliberately reject and forsake all the false realities that are continually presented to you day by day on the computer, the television, and books; those realities that either leave God out, or warp and twist His Word so that you will believe a lie?

I am talking now about all the shows on television and on the computer that have a story to tell, but in doing so they present a false reality. Let me give you some examples. There are many shows on TV these day that put forth the message that doing murder and violence are good and justifiable in order for things to work out for you in the end, in a human sense; as though this life is all that there is. Both of those ideas are false. This life is not all that there is, and doing murder and violence, and living by force are not good and justifiable except in self-defense. Another example is the many sexually immoral and compromising images that are paraded across the screen of your TV and your computer that you might be watching. And God is grieved, by your participation in these things; but you are unaware. He knows that when you

watch them for any length of time that you will be defiled. And He knows that they take away all of your heart to see and receive spiritual truth. Then there is all the covetousness, the envy, the jealousy, the evil speaking against other people as though it is somehow a good and right thing to continually argue and fight with people around us; especially our parents. Another example is the many false things that are that are portrayed in the media of Television and computers about God Himself; the wrong views of God and His righteousness, the wrong views of Christ and His glory; the wrong views of how money and riches and material possessions supposedly bring happiness, when really they do not. I want to plead with you now that you would pray to God so that He would give you grace so that you would not be pursuing these things as somehow good, or permissible to you. They are not; and you should know that if you have the bad habit of abiding in those things, that your example in doing so will teach others that it is alright, and so God will not be honored, but dishonored by many.

But this need not be so, if you know Christ. You must learn to reject profane and old wives' tales. If you do use your computer or a smart phone, use it for God. Learn to cultivate the truth within your mind. It is the truth of the Word of God that will set you free. If the television is not giving you a vision for what God is wanting you to cultivate in your mind and heart, then stop watching it. If your smart phone is leading you into sinful and forbidden paths, you must put it down or turn it off, or cultivate decidedly Christians pursuits in relation to the apps that you have on it. You are going to have to decide, on many occasions, whether it will be some vain show or movie that you will watch, or whether God's word will in some way be brought into your life. You will have to decide whether you are going to be continually looking at your smart phone, or whether you will have personal or family devotions, or read a book which would be profitable to your soul. And when will you learn to pray if you are always looking at your phone? And when will you instruct your children, or spend quality time talking with your husband or wife?

In terms of all these spiritual these activities, God does keep score. He is keeping track of what you do with the truth that you have been given. You will be moving toward godliness when you don't engage in idle talk; when you don't believe, watch, and pursue the fables that men make up which they place in books, in films, and continually on-line. I wonder if each of us will wake up to the reality that Satan is trying to so infiltrate your life with these false things, that you will eventually forget all about God, and all about the truth of His word. Will you let him deceive you in way? What a terrible awakening it will be for some on the Day of Judgment when they find that they have totally misspent the time that God gave them, to come to know Him, and to serve Him in the way that He desired. There will be some who will be cast into hell because they were lazy and unprofitable servants. They may have professed to know God, but by their practices; their deeds which follow them; they denied Him. Take care that it is not you. Reject profane and old wives tales; which is what is mostly paraded around over the television, the computers, and the smart phones these days; and exercise yourself toward godliness. You will never regret it.

2nd – It is important to understand that Godliness is profitable for all things in this life.

Verse 8 says, "For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is..." Our salvation rests upon the truth of the gospel promises. The gospel is; that if we believe in Christ that we shall be saved. But the same promise that saves us in relation to our faith in the Lord Jesus, also holds promise in relation to our being blessed even now, in the living of our Christian life, if we will exercise ourselves unto godliness. I want to show you a few verses related to this wonderful truth. Look over with me at 1 Timothy 2, verse 1. "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may

lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.” This is how you exercise yourself unto godliness; it is when you learn to pray for all men, all kinds of men; especially those like kings who are in political power and authority. What is the reason for that? Well, they are to be prayed for, that they might be saved. It says so in verses 3 and 4; “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” But it is even more than that. We exercise ourselves to pray so that we might lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence (or dignity). It is because the work and labors and advancement of the kingdom of God and Christ thrive and flourish in a God-glorifying sense, better, when Christians are not being hounded and persecuted. There is, then, time for reading and Bible study, and the teaching of the converts is not disrupted as it is in days of persecution. This is not to say that the kingdom of God does not go forward in times of persecution. God is certainly able to do that. But it is better for the Church’s on-going work of teaching and worship when she is not being continually hounded and oppressed by men; when her members are able to lead a quiet and a peaceful life. Let me ask you if you pray for that? Ask yourself now, if prayer is something that you exercise yourself to do? If not, it is something that you should begin to do, so that you might be strong as a Christian, so that others might be saved, and so that you might not live a life of turmoil and agitation, but a quiet and peaceable life, and thus glorify God by the way that you live.

Then if you will turn with me to 1 Peter Chapter 1, verse 1, you will find Peter giving an exhortation to add something to your faith by way of exercise. “Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world through lust.”

Let me stop for a moment and say that once again we see that our faith and salvation rest upon the promises of God. Those promises of grace are given to those who believe in Jesus Christ. Those who believe come to know this divine power which is the Holy Spirit conveying that ability to those who believe to begin to live godly in Christ Jesus. Those who believe are called “partakers of the divine nature”, and those who “have escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” Since we who believe have received these blessings of the New Birth and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and have experienced a death to sin in our hearts when we were converted, then Peter says that we have a responsibility to exercise ourselves unto godliness.

Listen to verse 5 – “But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, (there’s the exercise) add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.” All these things we are to add to our faith, just as a man would engage himself in his bodily exercise in training for the competition in the Olympic games, being diligent in it every day. Now, we need to understand that the Lord Jesus, when He was here upon the earth, did not tell His disciples and His apostles that there was an appointed time each day for them to get down and do their calisthenics . He did not have them form lines and tell them to do push-ups, and squat-thrusts, and deep-knee bends and back bends, and things like that. He did not tell them to get themselves a white training outfit and then teach them physical exercises in relation to their godliness. But He did tell Peter how it was that a man or a woman could exercise themselves unto godliness.

I know that there are a number of people here in this congregation today who are engaging in bodily exercise every day so that they might be physically fit, and healthy. This is no doubt a good thing, and it does profit a little. But let us also see the great profit and value of godliness.

Can each believer here exercise themselves unto godliness every day in a spiritual way, taking their cue from the things which the physical athlete does? Persevere in reading your Bible and praying. Persevere in cultivating the excellent qualities of the fruit of the Spirit in your life; Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Gentleness, Goodness, Kindness, Faithfulness, and Self-control. Determine in your heart that you do not have to say that unkind thing, or point out all the sins and weaknesses of a person whom you call brother, to someone else. Add brotherly kindness and deliberately study to do other people good, as a regular exercise in your life. You will be amazed, and others will be amazed at how strong and how spiritually healthy you will have become by these exercises if you choose by the grace of God to do them.

3rd – It is important to understand that godliness brings with it, promise for the life to come.

Verse 8 says, “For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.” Now I want you to notice the wording here; the promise of the life to come. There is a life the life that now is; and there is the life to come. And godliness, it says, is profitable for all things; for both. I want you to think about another verse as well, in relation to this one that we are studying. It is found in 1st Timothy 6: 6. “Now godliness with contentment is great gain.” “For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.” Let me ask you in closing whether you as a Christian are exercising yourself toward godliness? If you are, you will have great contentment in all that you do in this life, and you will have much to look forward to in the next. Listen to how the Apostle Paul spoke to King Agrippa and the governor Festus when he was trying to defend himself for his preaching of the gospel. Acts 24: 10 – “Then Paul, after the governor had nodded to him to speak, answered: ‘Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself, because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship.’” “And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city.” “Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me.” “But this I confess to you, that according to the way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets.” “I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.” “This being so, I myself always strive (you see he was exercising even then) to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.” He had exercised himself towards godliness all through his Christian life, and he was exercising himself toward godliness when he was witnessing before governors and kings. He was going to so live that he would have a clear conscience in doing whatever he was doing at the very time that he was unsure of the outcome in relation to what men would do to him and with him. This is how I hope that you and I will live as well. Because all of our exercise will be remembered and rewarded in the life to come.