

II. The Means of Vivification

1.) Vivification By “Exercise”

God vivifies His people in conjunction with their exercise of spiritual graces; as the believer, enabled by the Holy Spirit, exercises faith, hope, love, and all spiritual virtues, as he flees vice, as he practices spiritual discipline and puts in practice all the inward and outward attitudes and actions that characterize the Son of Man, the second Adam, and rejects all the evils of attitude and action that characterize the fallen first Adam, he grows in holiness. The old man is progressively put to death, and the new man grows in strength by means of exercise. By practicing holiness the Christian becomes more holy; by fighting and mortifying sin he becomes less sinful. This truth is evidenced by an abundance of Biblical terminology.

1.) Vivification by “Exercise”

First, Scripture specifically states that *exercise*¹ produces godliness. Paul commanded Timothy to “refuse” evil and “exercise [himself] *rather* unto godliness” (1 Timothy 4:7).² Growth in godliness by means of disciplined spiritual exercise is compared to growth in physical strength by means of physical exercise (1 Timothy 4:8).³ One develops from being a spiritual baby to one of “full age,”⁴ of Christian maturity, “by reason of use⁵ . . . [by] exercis[ing] . . . [the] senses . . . to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:11-14).⁶ Those who are disciplined or “exercised”⁷ by “chastening” see it

¹ The words involved are γυμνάζω (1 Timothy 4:7; Hebrews 5:14; 12:11; 2 Peter 2:14), γυμνασία (1 Timothy 4:8),

² τοὺς δὲ βεβήλους καὶ γραώδεις μύθους παραιτοῦ. γύμναζε δὲ σεαυτὸν πρὸς εὐσέβειαν· ἡ γὰρ σωματικὴ γυμνασία πρὸς ὀλίγον ἐστὶν ὠφέλιμος· ἡ δὲ εὐσέβεια πρὸς πάντα ὠφέλιμος ἐστὶν, ἐπαγγελίαν ἔχουσα ζωῆς τῆς νῦν καὶ τῆς μελλούσης. (1 Timothy 4:7-8).

³ Thus, γυμνάζω is “to experience vigorous training and control, with the implication of increased physical and/or moral strength — ‘to train, to undergo discipline’” or “to control oneself by thorough discipline — ‘to discipline oneself, to keep oneself disciplined’” (Louw-Nida, γυμνάζω, 36.11; 88.88).

⁴ τέλειος, “pertaining to being mature, *full-grown, mature, adult* . . . pertaining to being fully developed in a moral sense” (BDAG, def. #2, 4).

⁵ ἔξις in Hebrews 5:14 indicates an “acquired habit . . . trained habit, skill” (Liddell-Scott, def. #3), “a repeated activity — ‘practice, doing again and again, doing repeatedly’” (Louw-Nida).

⁶ The passage specifically states that the mature have their “senses exercised to discern both good and evil . . . by reason of use,” in contrast with the immature, without specifically and directly stating that the transition takes place by means of the exercise, but the fact is nonetheless indubitably implied.

⁷ The perfect participle γεγυμνασμένοις in Hebrews 12:11 indicates that the resultant state of possessing a spiritually exercised or spiritually strengthened state resulted from the externally presented action of a correct response to chastening.

“yiel[d] the peaceable fruit of righteousness” (Hebrews 12:11). The godly can have their hearts strengthened in righteousness, like the ungodly can grow in their wickedness by means of a “heart . . . exercised with covetous practices” (2 Peter 2:14).⁸ “[E]very holy work, of hand, or head, or heart, is a contribution to the formation of holy habits, very much as physical exercises develop the muscles which perform them. To such an extent as this there is action and reaction, a holy heart prompting to holy acts, and these again reflecting an influence back upon the heart.”⁹

Since holiness is increased by means of spiritual exercise, how necessary it is for the Christian to exercise himself unto godliness! Spiritual laziness will not produce growth, but weakness. Failure to engage in such exercise will certainly hinder your growth in godliness, and as neglect of exercise in the physical realm will certainly weaken you physically, neglect of spiritual exercise will certainly make you spiritually weak. Furthermore, your failure to exercise yourself unto godliness is itself indulgence in sin, and such indulgence will lead to ever-greater spiritual weakness. On the contrary, diligently pursue godliness, engage in right decisions, exercise your spiritual senses to discern good and evil, and patiently, regularly, yea, continuously exercise and employ the means through which the Holy Spirit strengthens your inner man. View seasons of trial and tribulation as occasions in which you can, in a particular way, strengthen your spiritual life as your heavenly Father puts you under special strain so that you might come out all the stronger. For as through physical exercise God will certainly strengthen your physical body, so through diligent spiritual exercise God will certainly strengthen your inner man spiritually and renew you ever the more into the image of Christ.

2.) Vivification By “Striving”

Growth in holiness and progressive weakening of indwelling sin takes place as the believer strives against and fights sin, depending upon his sanctifying God for victory. Spiritual life increases as the believer continually¹⁰ “striveth for the mastery” (1

⁸ καρδίαν γεγυμνασμένην πλεονεξίαις ἔχοντες. The perfect participle indicates the state of a more wicked heart that resulted from the exercise of evil. Such exercise in evil can lead to the unregenerate being all the more unable to “cease from sin” (ἀκαταπαύστους ἀμαρτίας, 2 Peter 2:14), while the opposite sort of exercise by the righteous leads them to progressively greater difficulty sinning and greater ease and higher degrees of obedience.

⁹ Pg. 267, “Means and Measure of Holiness,” Thomas Smith. *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review* (April 1876) 251-280.

¹⁰ That is, he is ὁ ἀγωνιζόμενος, the present tense conveying the continual action. The “striving” connected with spiritual life in the New Testament is regularly connected with the present tense and conveys continual action (1 Corinthians 9:25; Colossians 1:29; 4:12; 1 Timothy 6:12). A definite

Corinthians 9:25), running spiritually with the perseverance and extreme effort, diligence, and labor of one who wins a competitive athletic race (9:24) or a boxing match (9:26),¹¹ keeping under (9:27) his indwelling sin and striving against it so that it is weakened and, as it were, boxed and pummeled down,¹² given a black eye,¹³ and brought into slavish subjection.¹⁴ Strenuous strife, agonizing¹⁵ to defeat sin, must not be self-dependent or independent moralism, but be “labour” that is “striving according to [God’s] working,” as God “worketh . . . in [the believer] mightily” (Colossians 1:29)—God supernaturally energizes¹⁶ the believer’s effort to mortify sin and exercise virtue and thus remains the sole ultimate Agent for all increase in spiritual life and eradication of sinful tendencies, but the believer must nonetheless “labou[r] fervently” (Colossians 4:12),¹⁷ and “fight” (1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 4:7). He must fight spiritual battles clothed in spiritual armor (Ephesians 6:10-17) with the sword of the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews

difference between ἀγωνίζομαι in the present and in the aorist is apparent in the Koiné; compare, in the LXX, the aorists in 1 Maccabees 7:21; 2 Maccabees 8:16; 13:14; Sirach 4:28 with the present in 2 Maccabees 15:27, or the aorists in 1 Clement 35:4; 2 Clement 7:1–3 and the present tenses in 2 Clement 7:4 & Barnabas 4:11 among the apostolic patristics.

¹¹ Note πυκτεύω, “to fight with fists, box” (BDAG), to “box, spar” (Liddell-Scott); cf. *Testament of Job* 4:10, καὶ ἔσῃ ὡς ἀθλητῆς πυκτεύων καὶ καρτερῶν πόνους καὶ ἐκδεχόμενος τὸν στέφανον, “For you will be like a sparring athlete, enduring pain and receiving the crown,” or Philo, *On the Preliminary Studies* 48.

¹² οὕτω πυκτεύω, ὡς οὐκ ἀέρα δέρων ἀλλ’ ὑπωπιάζω μου τὸ σῶμα καὶ δουλαγωγῶ, 1 Corinthians 9:26-27.

¹³ The verb ὑπωπιάζω, found in 1 Corinthians 9:27 and Luke 18:5 and translated “keep under” and “weary” in those texts, means “to blacken an eye, give a black eye, strike in the face,” and by extension “to bring someone to submission by constant annoyance, wear down” or “to put under strict discipline, punish, treat roughly, torment” (BDAG; cf. Liddell-Scott).

¹⁴ Paul brings his body into subjection (1 Corinthians 9:27) with the verb δουλαγωγέω, meaning “enslave, subjugate . . . mak[e] a slave out of” (BDAG), “make a slave, treat as such” (Liddell-Scott), for so vice would not enslave him as it did the unregenerate (*Apology of Justin Martyr* 2:11). One subdues (δουλαγωγέω) men by beheading them, crucifying them, throwing them to wild beasts, and with chains, fire, and all other kinds of torture (Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho* 110).

¹⁵ The English verb *to agonize* is related etymologically to the Greek verb under discussion, *agonidzomai* (ἀγωνίζομαι).

¹⁶ Thus, note the use of ἐνέργεια and ἐνεργέω in Colossians 1:29 for God’s supernaturally energizing and working in the believer to will and exert energy to do His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13, ὁ Θεὸς γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ ἐνεργῶν ἐν ὑμῖν καὶ τὸ θέλειν καὶ τὸ ἐνεργεῖν ὑπὲρ τῆς εὐδοκίας). Compare the other texts that refer to the energizing and working of the Father (1 Corinthians 12:6; Ephesians 1:3, 19-20, 3:20; Colossians 1:29), the Son (Ephesians 4:16; Philippians 3:21), the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:11), and the undifferentiated Trinity (Galatians 2:8; Ephesians 3:7; Colossians 2:12) in believers, and the association of this working with the Word (1 Thessalonians 2:13). The Head of the body, the church, energizes the members of His body to work, and as they work, because of His working in them, individual growth and corporate growth in the congregation takes place (Ephesians 4:15-16).

¹⁷ Of course, Colossians 4:12 speaks of Epaphras’ fervent labor in prayer for others, not his own labor to grow in grace, but the text nevertheless illustrates the nature of the verb ἀγωνίζομαι, which in other texts is more directly related to one’s personal mortification of sin and vivification.

4:12).¹⁸ He must run like one who is determined to win his spiritual race (1 Corinthians 9:24, 26), removing every obstacle that could hinder him (Hebrews 12:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:1; cf. Galatians 2:2; 5:7; Philippians 2:16).¹⁹ He must “resis[t]”²⁰ unto blood, striving²¹ against sin” (Hebrews 12:4) and exert intense effort or “contend”²² (Jude 3) for the truth. The Christian life is a “fight” or “conflict”²³ like a gladiatorial contest (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:32²⁴), a wrestling match (Ephesians 6:12),²⁵ or a grueling athletic race (Hebrews 12:1) or struggle in other athletic contests.²⁶ The believer must exert the most intense efforts to defeat his old man and utterly vanquish indwelling sin, and as he does so, God gives him victory and he grows more holy.

¹⁸ The sword (μάχαιρα) of the Word is the Christian’s only offensive fighting weapon. It is noteworthy how the abundance of athletic struggle imagery in sanctification contrasts with the paucity of imagery of physical warfare—while the μάχαιρα of the Word appears in Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12, words like πολεμέω, πόλεμος, μάχομαι, μάχη, or διαμάχομαι, although all present in the New Testament, are not employed of the believer’s holy struggle with sin. It appears that the wholesome and profitable nature of bodily exercise (1 Timothy 4:8) made its terms more fit to describe sanctification than terms for the wretched evil of the butchery of men in the warfare of nations.

¹⁹ The imagery of “running” (τρέχω) for the Christian life is thus employed in 1 Corinthians 9:24, 26; Galatians 2:2; 5:7; Philippians 2:16; 2 Thessalonians 3:1; Hebrews 12:1.

²⁰ ἀντικαθίστημι, “to resist by actively opposing pressure or power” (Louw-Nida).

²¹ ἀνταγωνίζομαι, “struggle against” (BDAG; Liddell-Scott). The present participle indicates continual striving. The believing Hebrews were already striving against sin, and Paul exhorted them to do so even up to the point of violent death and the shedding of their own blood. They were not to “faint” in this struggle (Hebrews 12:5).

²² ἐπαγωνίζομαι, “to exert intense effort on behalf of something, contend. [The verb is] used in athletic imagery[.] . . . The primary semantic component in the use of this verb in Jude 3 is the effort expended by the subject in a noble cause; as such it is the counterpart of the author’s πᾶσαν σπουδὴν ποιούμενος and a manifestation of ἀρετή” (BDAG). Philo employs the verb of one who “still strives on, in no way remitting his intense anxiety, but without admitting any excuse, or any hesitation, or vacillation; using all the means in his power to gain his object” (*On the Posterity and Exile of Cain* 13: ὁμῶς ἐπαγωνιέται μηδὲν συντόνου σπουδῆς ἀνιείς, ἀλλὰ πᾶσι τοῖς παρ’ ἑαυτοῦ εἰς τὸ τυχεῖν ἀπροφασίστως καὶ ἀόκνως συγχρόμενος).

²³ ἀγών, “contest, race . . . a struggle against opposition, struggle, fight” (BDAG). See Philippians 1:30; Colossians 2:1; 1 Thessalonians 2:2; 1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 4:7; Hebrews 12:1.

²⁴ θηριομαχέω; compare Josephus, *Antiquities* 16:137 (ἦν οὖν εὐθὺς ἐν καθιερώσει μείζονες ἑορταὶ καὶ παρασκευαὶ πολυτελέσταται κατηγγέλκει μὲν γὰρ ἀγῶνα μουσικῆς καὶ γυμνικῶν ἀθλημάτων παρεσκευάκει δὲ πολὺ πλῆθος μονομάχων καὶ θηρίων ἵππων τε δρόμον καὶ τὰ πολυτελέστερα τῶν ἐν τε τῇ Ῥώμῃ καὶ παρ’ ἄλλοις τισὶν ἐπιτηδευμάτων; There was accordingly a great festival, and most sumptuous preparations made presently, in order to its dedication; for he had appointed a contention in music, and games to be performed naked; he had also gotten ready a great number of those that fight single combats, and of beasts for the like purpose; horse races also, and the most chargeable of such sports and shows as used to be exhibited at Rome, and in other places.).

²⁵ πάλη, Liddell-Scott. Compare the uses in Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 125 and Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* 3:190 for Jacob’s wrestling (πάλη) with God in Genesis 32, and, Philo alleges, against his passions and for virtue (*On Sobriety* 65; *On the Change of Names* 14).

²⁶ cf. ἀγών, Liddell-Scott; cf. Wisdom 4:2; 2 Maccabees 4:18; 2 Clement 7:1-5.

By exercise in this manner the Christian is progressively vivified. Do you so exercise yourself to gain mastery over sin? Consider that God admonishes you to exercise yourself like one who is to win a race (1 Corinthians 9:24); thus, you should strive to be the most holy person possible. Mediocrity is not acceptable. You are not to strive to be like the average man of the world, who is yet on his way to eternal damnation (Matthew 7:13-14). You are not to be like the average professor of Christianity, and be satisfied with yourself, rest content and put yourself at ease, if you think you have arrived to equality with them, or with the spiritual level you see in your godly friends and acquaintances. You are not to commend yourself by comparing yourself favorably with others (2 Corinthians 10:12)—indeed, the further along you go, and the more Christlikeness you have come to, the more lowly you will be in your own eyes,²⁷ and the higher you will esteem others in comparison with yourself—but to set before you the standard of the perfect holiness of the Man Christ Jesus, and set your face as a flint after that goal, striving, agonizing, after it, pummeling and beating down your indwelling sin, and refraining from resting in this agonizing spiritual battle for even a moment until you reach perfect deliverance at the end of your earthly sojourn. You are also to be “temperate in all things” (1 Corinthians 9:25). Such temperance will affect your spiritual discipline, as you spend focused time in prayer and reading, study, memorization, and meditation on the Scriptures. Short times of prayer and Bible study are hardly evidence of striving—while the Bible never specifies an exact amount of time to spend in spiritual exercises, as such will vary depending upon an innumerable number of circumstances, surely it is far more common for believers to spend too little time than too much. How many hours does a marathon runner spend daily in his training? How many are you spending seeking to win Christlikeness and a heavenly crown? Do you carefully listen to preaching and seek to apply it to yourself the way an Olympic athlete listens to coaching about how to defeat his competition and win the gold medal? Furthermore, are you temperate in your interaction with others in the church and in the world? A haughty spirit that is unwilling to heed rebuke and hardens itself against instruction will never win the prize. Do you run with focused, continuing, passionate diligence, or “as uncertainly,” being faithful one day and careless the next? How long would a boxer last in his match if every second round he let down his guard? Do you let down your guard and let sin knock

²⁷ While one can hardly say that these diminutives are exclusive, so that by employing a lesser one Paul would have, if asked, denied the greater, it is noteworthy that, comparing Paul’s earlier to his later epistles, as the great saint grows in holiness and thus humility, he designates himself first as “least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle” (1 Corinthians 15:9), then later “less than the least of all saints” (Ephesians 3:8), and finally “chief . . . [of] sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15).

you around, falling, perhaps, for the same wiles time and time again? Beware, for in so doing you are set to be a “castaway” (1 Corinthians 9:27), a spritual loser. Will you, in shame, come in the last place in the only race with eternal value? Can you strive for vanities such as money or approval—or even for necessary things such as the care of your family, but fail to strive in the most important contest of all? You have the constant work of a lifetime ahead of you—strive after that perfect holiness that is the unchangeable and eternal standard of the Holy One and your Redeemer, so that you can say truthfully the words of Paul: “I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day” (2 Timothy 4:7-8).