

Godliness

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Introduction.

- A. Once again, as we continue through this sermon series in the last part of this year, we find ourselves coming face to face with 2 Peter 1:5-8. This week, as we continue to ascend the ladder of spiritual accomplishment, the virtue in the spotlight is godliness. At first glance, this seems like a weird choice. Even in the church, we don't hear a lot about godliness, and most Christians aren't able to supply a good definition on the spot. If anything, most of us would probably say that godliness is trying to be like God, which actually isn't true.
- B. So. . . what's this confusing, hard-to-pin-down idea doing in Peter's list? It's here for a reason, because it marks a very important shift in our spiritual perspective. It marks a time when we start making choices for reasons that don't make sense to the world. For most new Christians, the force behind their conversion is fear of hell. They agree to serve Jesus because they believe that He can save them from eternal punishment, which they really don't want to undergo. A lot of the other virtues we've been looking at, like knowledge, self-control, and perseverance, are just logical extensions of this same conception of Christianity as fire insurance.
- C. Now, there's certainly nothing wrong with wanting to avoid hell; indeed, it's something that I want very much, but it's an immature motivation for our spirituality. The problem with that is that it leads us to a minimal view of what we should do. We ask, "What do I have to do to not get fried forever and ever?", and we don't ever do more than that because we don't have to. Once godliness begins to enter the picture, though, that begins to change. We're no longer so intent on avoiding hell. Instead, our focus becomes a search for God, and that search leads us to places we would never have gone otherwise. Once we start caring about godliness is when we begin to imitate Christ. Let's ponder this important value, then, as we look at godliness.

I. Its Definition.

- A. As always, before we start talking about any spiritual subject, we need to know what we're talking about. Let's begin with a definition of godliness. Probably the best Scripture to help us in this quest is 1 Timothy 4:7-10. There's not really a definition in here, but there are some nuggets we can mine to help us construct a definition. Notice first of all that godliness starts with hope in the living God. This leads the Christian to labor and struggle to produce godliness, which in turn is useful both in the present life and in the life to come.
- B. So what can we take from all this? As we said earlier, godliness is not God-likeness. It's better described as God-towardness. It's a focus on God and what we can do to serve and please Him. Other words that line up with godliness are reverence and piety. There are some subtle but significant differences, then, between godliness and faith. Take, for instance, the way that faith operates in the plan of salvation. We don't call the plan of salvation the plan of God-finding, because salvation, and not finding God, is its object. We believe, repent, confess, and are baptized because we want to be saved. Godliness, on the other hand, isn't so concerned with results. For instance, we try to save the lost because of godliness. The Bible doesn't warn us that bad things will happen to us unless someone is converted because of us; instead, we evangelize because that's what God wants. It doesn't ask all the time, "What's in it for me?" Godliness just wants to serve God, and it's not terribly concerned with the consequences. It looks to the Almighty, because nothing else matters.

II. Its Effects.

- A. If we look at the world in a godly way, it will have dramatic effects on our behavior. We will seek out things that we would otherwise shun because we want to be godly. One of the things like this that accompanies godliness is **FEAR**. We see this appear in Hebrews 11:7. Here, Noah is cited as an example both of faith and this kind of godly fear. Notice the way that these two impulses work together in this case. God warned Noah about the coming flood and told him to build an ark. On the one hand, Noah believed God. He knew that if he stayed right where he was, he was going to be fish food, and so he acted to save himself and his family. On the other hand, Noah was moved with godly, reverent fear. This was a much simpler thought process. It said, "God told me to build an ark, so I need to obey God." These different things produced the same result.
- B. Godly fear will often work together with faith in our lives. For instance, if Satan tempts us to lie, we may well come up with two reasons why we need to tell the truth instead. The first is faith-based. We say to ourselves, "Lying is a sin, and sin will cost me my soul. I don't want to lose my soul, so I'd better not sin." The second, though, is godliness-based. It says, "Lying displeases God, and I want to please God instead, so I'd better not lie." That's what godly fear does. It's not fear of consequences, per se. It's fear of making God unhappy.
- C. Just as we might be moved by godly fear before we sin, we experience godly **SORROW** after we sin. The classic Biblical description of godly sorrow, of course, is in 2 Corinthians 7:9-10. We often use this passage to explain one of the steps of the plan of salvation, but in context, it's actually talking about the repentance of someone who's already a Christian. This sorrow is the regret we feel when we understand that we have

wronged God. Let me give you an example of the way that this works. As you folks know, one of my personality traits is a big mouth—often big enough to stick both feet in at the same time. As a result, it's not uncommon for me to say things that hurt Lauren's feelings. When I do that, I'm generally regretful about it, and I'm moved to apologize. I don't offer her that apology because I'm concerned about the consequences. I'm not worried about having to sleep on the couch and eat cold cereal for the next week. Instead, because she's grieved, that grieves me too. Godly sorrow works the same way. It's grief for hurting God.

- D. As we continue with this list of seemingly unpleasant, but good, things that godliness produces, we next turn our attention to **SELF-DENIAL**. Paul discusses this idea in Titus 2:11-12. When we get right down to it, this is a passage that's talking about choices. There are two roads of life ahead of each one of us. We can choose the self-centered road, or we can choose the God-centered road. It's a question of which master we want to obey: the appetites that dwell within us, or the Father who reigns in heaven. And, simply put, if we want to put God first, we're going to have to spend a lot of time telling ourselves, "No!" Just like my treasured Mizzou poster now lives in the garage because Lauren doesn't want it in her house, there are a bunch of things in our spiritual lives that we have to get rid of, because they aren't what God wants to see there. That's self-denial.
- E. Of course, not everything that results from godliness is painful or unpleasant. The Bible also tells us that godliness can lead to **GAIN**. This idea appears in 1 Timothy 6:6-8. In context, Paul is discussing a familiar type: people who view religion as a way to get rich. Just about every time we turn the TV to a religious channel, we see an example of this slimy behavior. What Paul tells us, though, is that godliness IS actually a behavior that leads to gain, although not in any way that the worldly people around us would accept. Whenever I'm talking with one of my non-Christian friends, I'm struck by how often the conversation revolves around money and stuff. One of the main goals of their lives, if not the main goal, is the collection of such things, because they believe it will make them happy. The godly person doesn't live like that because he doesn't have to. He doesn't have this void in his life that he tries to fill with material goods, because that hole is already filled with his relationship with God. That's a blessing that all the money on earth can't buy. If we really understand what we have in God, we won't want those things, because there's nothing they can give us.
- F. In a similar vein, godliness also produces **SINCERITY**. Paul describes this truth in himself in 2 Corinthians 1:12. This passage actually goes right along with something I've always noticed about strong Christians. They're courteous and always try to speak the best of everyone, but they're not devious and manipulative. Instead, they are very simple and straightforward in their manner. This dignified simplicity is a byproduct of godliness. Here's the way it works: Worldly people always want something, and they are driven by their desires. They want money, they want companionship, the list goes on and on. The pressure that they feel to find satisfaction in those things warps their behavior and their character. They want things so badly that they are willing to lie and deceive to get them. Not so for the Christian. He's already got what he wants out of life in his search for God, and no one can take that away from him. Because that's so, even though he enjoys earthly blessings, his character is not warped by them. He doesn't lie because he has no real reason to lie. That's how godliness produces simplicity and sincerity in a child of God, which inevitably transforms our lives.
- G. However, there's one thing that can mar the Christian's calm: injury or insult directed toward God. That's why sometimes godliness produces **JEALOUSY**. This is not normally a trait we view as good, but consider the light in which Paul presents it in 2 Corinthians 11:2. Here's what was going on: Paul had come to Corinth and converted the Corinthians because he wanted to present them as a gift to God. In Paul's wake, though, false teachers had come in and begun to turn the new Christians away from the truth of the gospel to other things. That really made Paul angry. The problem wasn't that the false teachers made him look bad; he makes clear in the rest of 2 Corinthians that he couldn't care less about that. The problem was that those false teachers were corrupting people he meant for God, just like I would be mad if I bought flowers for Lauren, but one of you came by our house, threw the flowers on the floor, and stomped on them. Paul had godly jealousy.
- H. This godly jealousy is something that we should learn. During our time on earth, we should be very protective of the things that belong to God. That certainly includes the money and the resources that Christians have given to God's work, but most of all, it includes the people who belong to God. We shouldn't be OK with it when one of our young people is being corrupted by evil friends. We shouldn't be fine with some false teacher leading Christians astray with corrupt doctrine. We should react jealously to defend what is God's.
- I. Finally, though, and perhaps most ominously, godliness produces **PERSECUTION**. Consider the promise that Paul makes in 2 Timothy 3:12. Once again, this is no surprise. Remember what it was like for the kids in junior high school who didn't have the cool shoes or the cool shirt? As one of those kids, I can tell you—they get made fun of and left out. How, then, are people going to react to the godly? We don't just have some skin-deep difference from the rest of the world. Instead, our priorities and our actions will be fundamentally different. Some people are going to be accepting of that. Some are just not going to understand it. Some are going to push back against it. For instance, the godly man is going to make it his priority to assemble with the saints on the first day of the week. A lot of employers, especially around here, are not going to appreciate that, so they react unfavorably or even fire him. That's persecution from godliness.

Conclusion. If you want to learn the joys of godliness, become a child of God today.