



Godliness

Godliness is vitally important. Paul writes to young Timothy: *'Refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto 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'* (1 Tim. 4:7-9). Godliness gives us the best of both worlds. 'Bodily exercise' profits a little. It makes you feel good, the body stronger and healthier and you may live a few years longer, but then you will die. Godliness, however, brings God's blessing and happiness to you now in this world and after you die you will go to heaven to be eternally blessed. This is a faithful saying, comes with apostolic authority, and should be accepted by all.

But what is godliness? In this article I would like to note fourteen of its characteristics.

1. Fear of God

'The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom' (Prov. 9:10), ie, central to wise living. Awe and reverence for God, giving Him His place, is where godliness begins. It is having God as the biggest person in your life. In contrast, it is said of the wicked, *'There is no fear of God before their eyes'* (Rom. 3:18). Can you say that God is always there to you and that you are aware of living out your life in His presence? Is it becoming increasingly the case with you, the older you grow?

2. Holiness

The English word 'godliness' means 'God-likeness'. God says, *'Be ye holy; for I am holy'* (1 Pet. 1:16). But what is God like? The Ten Commandments describe His character. He even kept the first Sabbath as a pattern for us to follow. We must not covet, tell lies, steal, lust, hate, disrespect authority, break the Sabbath, use God's name irreverently, worship God in a way that He has not commanded, nor be devoted to anyone or anything as much as Him.

3. Love

Godliness is essentially loving God with all our soul and strength and mind. This relates to the previous point in that Christ stated, *'If ye love me, keep my commandments'* (Jn. 14:15). It also involves piety, devotion and enjoying God: *'Delight thyself also in the Lord'* (Ps. 37:4). Be satisfied with none but Him. We are to desire fellowship with Him and His felt presence in our lives.

4. Faith

Faith is essential to salvation: *'Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him'* (Heb. 11:6). Christ has earned salvation for us and we must constantly look to Him for it. It's not just a matter of believing at the beginning of our Christian life, but rather a walk of faith. There must be no trust in our own works, but a constant resting upon the finished work of our Saviour. Each day we must look afresh to God for help. The godly life is a life of dependence on the Lord.

5. Repentance

For sinners like us, repentance must always go along with faith. They are two sides of the one coin. Sin is natural and easy, even after conversion. Daily we must search our hearts, confess our

sin, claim the blood and seek grace to never sin again. A godly man has a sensitive conscience, knows growing conviction of sin, mourns over his failure and cries to the Lord for mercy.

6. Prayer

Prayerfulness and godliness go together. In prayer we express our faith and repentance, we praise and glorify God, we give thanks to the Lord for His providence and grace, we plead for our needs and intercede for others. Enoch walked with God and surely a large part of this is awareness of God and talking constantly to him. Spurgeon said that he seldom prayed for a quarter of an hour, but seldom did a quarter of an hour go by without him praying. Closely related to prayer is singing Psalms of praise to God. God Himself supplies the best words.

7. Bible

We talk to God in prayer and He talks to us through His Word. If you love someone you will read their letters with great interest. How much more should we study the Scriptures! We want to be godly and God-pleasing; how important then to read His Word where He gives us directions to that end. The Psalmist could say: *'O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day'* (Ps. 119:97). Feed upon it, be constantly asking for light and understanding and seek the grace to apply the Word to your heart and life.

8. The Means of Grace

The public worship of God, the preaching and teaching, the prayer and sacraments, and church discipline are all designed to produce godly men and women. The weekly prayer-meeting is not as well attended as it should be. Spurgeon called it the central heating of his church. The writer to the Hebrews warned, *'Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching'* (Heb. 10:25). There are special blessings connected with the gathering of at least two or three together in the name of Christ.

9. Good Works

Paul exhorted Titus, *'Let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful'* (Tit. 3:14). Good works will not save us, but also as James reminds us we will not be saved without good works: *'But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?'* (Jas. 2:20). Our Lord Jesus taught that even a cup of cold water given in His name will be rewarded: *'For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward'* (Mk. 9:41). Sometimes the question is asked as to what the role of women is in the church. Paul gives a partial answer to Timothy when he commends certain ladies: *'Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work'* (1 Tim. 5:10). And this should not be limited to women.

10. Rejecting Worldliness

Worldliness is the opposite of godliness. John exhorts, *'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever'* (1 Jn. 2:15-17). While we have duties in this world, and there are good things of God's providence to enjoy, we must be heavenly-minded with our hearts set on the things which are above.

11. Humility

Pride is taking the glory which belongs to God and giving it to ourselves. God hates pride. There are few things which He loathes more. Peter writes: *'All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time'* (1 Pet. 5:5-6). The godly with whom the Lord loves to dwell are described in Isaiah: *'For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones'* (Is. 57:15).

12. Spiritual

Godliness is to be spiritual, which in biblical terms means being filled with the Spirit. We are exhorted, *'Be filled with the Spirit'* (Eph. 5:18). Some have more of the Spirit than others and at some times we have more of the Spirit than at other times. We should seek to be dominated by the Spirit more and more. This will mean that we will bear the fruit of the Spirit in greater abundance, *'Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance'* (Gal. 5:22-23). The godliest are the most loving, joyful, peaceful, longsuffering, gentle, good, faithful, meek and temperate. That last adjective means exercising self-control, not being carried away by anything that belongs solely to this world.

13. Witnessing

The godly have a certain radiance about them. They do not hide their light under a bushel. In fact they cannot be hid for they are like a city set upon a hill. Their face shines as Moses' did, though they cannot see it themselves. I heard of a certain lady who struggled with assurance. Her pastor said it was as if she had a great light on her back but she walked in the shadow of it. All others could see whom she served and to whom she belonged. The godly, in loving their neighbours, long for their salvation and do all they can for it.

14. Waiting for Christ

Those characterised by godliness are not building a heaven in this world. Their heart is set on heaven and they long to be with Christ in that state where they will serve Him perfectly, with no sin ever again. Paul could say, viewing his death, *'To depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better'* (Phil. 1:23). In another place he wrote: *'I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. 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: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing'* (2 Tim. 4:6-8). Do you love and long for His appearing?

Bodily exercise, walking, running, the gym, profits a little, *'but godliness is profitable unto 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'* (1 Tim. 4:8-9). Are you striving after godliness?

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