

Growing In Godliness

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You've probably heard the phrase, "Cleanliness is next to godliness." It's an ancient idea, and various forms of that phrase have been found in Babylonian and Hebrew texts. The first record of it in its modern form is in a sermon by John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist denomination, when he said, "Slovenliness is no part of religion. Cleanliness is indeed next to Godliness." This phrase is speaking about the physical body and environment – outward cleanliness. And while there is obviously some wisdom in being clean and neat, this phrase, nor anything similar, is found in the Bible.

However, cleanliness of spirit is certainly connected to godliness. That's because godliness consists of an attitude of reverence and respect towards God that will be manifested in doing what is pleasing to God as well as emulating God's character. It's no surprise, then, that Peter includes godliness as one of the traits in which we need to grow in order to be fruitful in our knowledge of Jesus, to make our call and election sure, and to have an abundant entrance into the kingdom supplied to us (2 Pet. 1:5-11).

In the verses prior to the list of traits we are to grow in, Peter says that God *"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 that is in the world through lust"* (2 Pet. 1:3-4). By knowing Jesus, we have all that we need for the life God intended for us. By knowing Jesus, we have all that we need in order to be godly. And when we become what God has designed us to be, we will become like God – we will be partakers of the divine nature! After all, we were created in his image, and while our physical bodies were designed for this world, our spirits were designed for a different world – the world where God dwells. We were designed to be godly! While we won't become a god, we will be *like* God!

The struggle, of course, is to resist the temptation to be worldly which is, by nature, ungodly. Being godly requires a changing of our mind, a new way of thinking and approaching life. Paul put it this way in Romans 12:2 – *"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."* We must see and think of things differently which in turn will change the way we act. A godly attitude will lead to godly behavior.

The renewing of our mind that Paul speaks of is not a one-time act; it's an ongoing process, and so we are to be constantly inspecting our attitudes and actions to see if they are in line with what God is like. Godliness is opposed to everything that is opposed to God. Any attitude, behavior, action, or thought, therefore, that is not holy, that is not like God, is ungodly. And so anything that doesn't match up with who and what God is should be eschewed rather than embraced. This continual self-inspection allows us to purge anything ungodly from our life, for rest assured, we allow ungodliness to take root in our lives far too often.

When people get to know us and see how we think, what we do, how we behave, listen to how we talk and what we talk about, it should be extremely obvious to them that we are different than the rest of the world. When Peter and John were on trial in Acts 4, they boldly proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah and one through him salvation is offered. The Jewish rulers marveled at their boldness, and because of their actions and their words, Luke says, “they realized that they had been with Jesus.” Can that be said of you and me? When people are around us, can they tell we’ve been with Jesus? Our godliness should shine through in all that we say and do.

Each day, we’re tempted to be like the world. But God says “Be like me!” The world was made for destruction. But God’s family will live forever. Instead of trying to fit in with the world, let’s do our best to grow in godliness so we can fit in with God and his eternal family.