

## Godliness: *For Goodness Sake*. Intro

There are at least two charges that are presented to us by the Apostle Paul, both of which are challenges to our growth and development into Christlikeness. One is putting off the old self, i.e., dealing with sin in our lives. The second is putting on the new self, i.e., growing in Christian character (**Eph 4:17-24**).

"To put on the new self" is to abandon old, sinful behaviors and adopt a new identity defined by righteousness and holiness, created in the likeness of God. This process of sanctification and transformation is a conscious, ongoing process that involves renewing one's mind, rejecting deceitful desires, and actively living out our faith (**Phil 2:12-16**).

With this intentional effort toward growing in godliness, we have the fruit of the Spirit as a nine-fold list of traits that identify Christian character (**Gal 5:22-23**). There are also additional lists that are just as important to our understanding of what constitutes this type of character (**Col 3:12-16; Eph 4:2-3 and 32; James 3:17; 2 Ptr 1:5-7**).

For the purpose of our study, Godliness is more than Christian character. It covers the totality of the Christian life and provides the foundation upon which Christian character is built. It is the development of our godliness, "God-likeness", that shapes how we live and how we are viewed (**1 Tim 4:8**).

There is no higher compliment that can be paid to a Christian than to call him or her a godly person. In light of any other accolades that could be attributed to us, none of them matter if at the same time we are not seen as godly people; for goodness' sake (**Titus 2:11-13**).

This is why we are to train ourselves to be godly by pursuing it with unrelenting, persevering effort, not as a burden but as a privilege and a duty. This pursuit is simplified by God so that we don't need any special talent or equipment, or any prominence or pedigree (**2 Peter 1:1-4**). The most ordinary and most talented believers are both gifted for godliness.

What then is godliness? What are the marks of a godly person? How does a person become godly? Our goal in this study is to dive deeper than just answering these questions with terms like "Godlike", "Christlike", and "the fruit of the Spirit". Yes, godliness includes all of these, but it is certainly more than that.

Foundationally, godliness is *devotion in action* (**Gen 5:21-24; Heb 11:5**). From these two passages, we discover that Enoch walked with God, enjoyed a relationship with God, and pleased God. In other words, we could say he was devoted to God. This is the meaning of godliness.

The New Testament word for godliness, in its original meaning, conveys the idea of a personal attitude toward God that results in actions that are pleasing to God. This personal attitude toward God is what we call devotion to God, but it is always devotion and action.

Akin to, but different from, what we know to be our practice of scripture reading, prayer, meditation, and fasting as our daily “*devotions*”. Even our daily devotions are a part of our devotion in action. But not just a rote or routine activity, it is an attitude *toward* God and is inspired *by* God.

This attitude of devotedness to God is composed of three essential elements: The fear of God. The love of God. The desire for God. All of these focus on God. Therefore, the practice of godliness is an exercise or discipline that focuses upon God, and out of this arises the character and conduct that we usually think of as godliness.

It is this God-centered devotion that we need first before trying to develop Christian character, making it nearly impossible to please God without taking the time to walk with Him and develop a relationship with Him (**Heb 11:6**). When we fear Him, love Him, and desire Him, He will then be the center-most part of our lives (**1 Cor 10:31**).

Devotion to God, then, is the mainspring of Godly character. And this devotion is the only motivation for Christian behavior that is pleasing to God. He will be at the center of our thoughts. Our most basic duties will be done to His glory. Our daily walking, talking, living will look like Him.

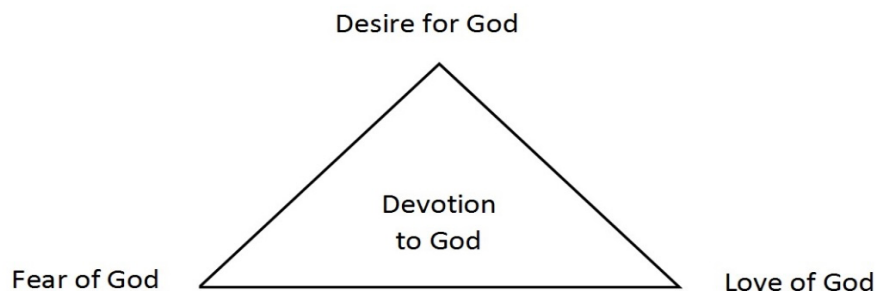
Godliness is more than Christian character; It is Christian character that springs from a devotion to God. But it is also true that devotion to God always results in godly character. Therefore, our working definition for this study is that: *Godliness is devotion to God that results in a life that is pleasing to Him* (**Col 1:9-12; Heb 13:20-21**).

## Godliness: *For Goodness Sake*. Part 2

We have created a working definition that: *Godliness is devotion to God that results in a life that is pleasing to Him (Eph 2:10 AMP)*. In other words, the practice of godliness is an ever-evolving *exercise* or *discipline* that focuses on God, and out of it is developed the character and conduct that helps us to look more like Him.

The ability to wear this *garment* of godliness (**Eph 4:22-24**) is in devotion and focus on Him above all else, where He becomes the preeminent presence in our lives (**Col 1:9-18**). Our concept, or what we believe about God and our relationship with Him, will determine our approach and our conduct.

Therefore, if we desire to have a Spirit-led devotedness to God, it requires an intentional fear of God, love of God, and desire for God. Individually, the fear of God and the love of God form the foundation of true devotion to God, while the desire for God is the highest expression of that devotion.



### The Fear of God:

While the fear of God may seem like an OT concept, it is as much of a truth and expectation in the NT, with some distinction (**Jer 32:40; Acts 9:31**). The OT presented it primarily as an “anxious dread”, while the NT presents it as that of veneration, reverence, and awe.

Fear as anxious dread is produced by the realization of God’s impending judgment on sin (**Gen 3:10**) and rightly so, particularly for the unsaved. As believers, we have been delivered from the fear of the wrath of God (**1 Jn 4:17-19**), though we are still subject to the discipline of God for our sinful ways, in which we still fear God (**Phil 2:12-13**).

This fear is the soul of godliness. It is the attitude that elicits from our hearts adoration and love, reverence and honor. For the saved, it focuses not on the wrath of God but upon the majesty, holiness, and transcendent glory of God (**Is 6:1-5; Mt 17:1-8**). It is impossible to be devoted to God if our hearts aren’t filled with a reverential fear of God.

We have to see Him first in His transcendent glory, majesty, and holiness before we see Him in His love, mercy, and grace. In the heart of the godly, there is a healthy tension that exists between the reverential awe of God and his glory and the childlike confidence in God as a heavenly father.

Without this tension, a Christian's childlike confidence can easily degenerate into a presumption that God's love makes all things permissible. This is how we end up with a lack of seriousness in our approach to the throne in prayer, our public presentation of God, and our light and trite embrace of the things of God.

Much to its demise, modern-day Christianity dishonorably magnifies the love of God almost to the exclusion of the fear of God: God is not only love (**1 Jn 4:8**), He is also Holy (**1 Ptr 1:16**). We need not preach fire and brimstone as an awakening to the love of God, but neither should we look for His love so much that we ignore His law and precept.

In other words, we should magnify the love of God, and although we bask in His love and mercy, we must never lose sight of His Majesty and His Holiness. This is why a "right concept" of God is so essential. It underpins and shapes our theology, daily actions, and relationship with the divine.

To fear God is to confess His absolute uniqueness (**Ex 15:11**); To acknowledge His Majesty, holiness, awesomeness, glory, and power. Along with this confession comes a healthy fear that helps to regulate our conduct (**Deut 6:2**). When we begin perceiving God as these things, our worship will begin to determine our behavior.

The fear of God should provide a primary motivation for, as well as result in, obedience to him. If we truly reverence God, we will obey him, since every act of disobedience is an offense to his dignity and His Majesty. It shows that we are, intentionally or unintentionally, dismissive of His person, character, will, and word.

*The essential ingredients of the fear of God are correct concepts of the character of God, a pervasive sense of the presence of God, and a constant awareness of our obligation to God.*  
**-Rev Albert N Martin, The Fear of God.**

### Questions:

1. In what way do you think you may have conflated or misaligned the fear of God and the love of God? How can a new understanding of the distinction between the two help you appropriate them?
2. A good way to make your study of godliness practical is to plan specific applications you can make in your daily speech, attitudes, and behavior. Take a moment to think out and write down some applications of godliness that can challenge you this week. Then consider which scripture passage is used in this study would be helpful to keep in mind for these applications.