

**“Putting Forth the Effort: Godliness”**

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness—through our knowledge of Him Who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does NOT have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

I remember watching TV a few years back and seeing commercials for a certain brand of dog food that involved showing pictures of people who looked very much like their pooches. Apparently these were pictures of participants who had entered a contest that the dog food company sponsored—a contest to see who most resembled their beloved canine companions. How many of you remember those commercials? Well, this week I did an internet search and found pictures of the winners of that contest and I want to show them to you. Here’s a shot of each of the six finalists. And, last but not least, here’s the grand prize winner—the person who most resembled their dog. Isn’t the resemblance between dog and owner amazing? I’ll explain why I showed you these shots in a moment but for

now let me say that today we are picking up where we left off last week as we examine “What a Christian Looks Like.” Our section from 2 Peter that I just read, Peter lists eight character traits that should be found in the life of any Christ-follower. We’ve said that these qualities are “*garments of grace*” — attitudes we should “put on” as grace-driven Christians. Well, by following this dress code—we become more and more like our Heavenly Father—we become recognized as His children—and here’s where this look-alike contest comes in, because if there were a contest to see which Christian most resembled God—well, those who mastered this dress code the best would be assured of making it to the finals.

As we have done with every term in this passage so far we begin our study of Godliness with a definition and the best way to get an accurate definition of a New Testament word is to go back to the Greek. The word we translate as “Godliness” here in 2nd Peter is the Greek word “eusebeia.” Sometimes it is translated as “holiness”—but it literally means, “genuine devoutness” or “piety.” It is a word used to describe the INWARD quality of a heart that is set completely on God, His kingdom, and His purposes. “Eusebia is God-centeredness.” Charles Swindoll helps us in our search for a good definition by saying that Godliness is, “...not skin deep. No—it is something below the surface of life, deep down in the realm of an attitude...an attitude toward God Himself. The person who is Godly is one whose heart is sensitive toward God—it’s someone who takes God seriously.”

This insight remind me of the Psalmist when he says, “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.” (Psalm 42:1-2) because a Godly person is someone who takes God this seriously—so

seriously that he or she longs and yearns to know God better. Relating to God is their number one “heart desire” in life. Another thing that helps us understand each of the various parts of the Christian’s dress-code is to look at it’s opposite, and the opposite of Godliness isn’t what you might first think. I mean, it’s not “demon-liness” or “devil-likeness.” No, the best antonym or opposite of Godliness is worldliness. This is what the Apostle John was saying in his first epistle when he wrote, “For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does— comes not from the Father but from the world.” (1 John 2:16)

Godliness is God-centeredness; then worldliness is self-centeredness. Worldliness is me, me, me. It’s getting what I want and when I want it. Worldliness is whatever makes sin look more attractive than God. It’s whatever makes you think that defying or ignoring God will bring you more reward than obeying Him.”

Why is Godliness important? Godliness is important because God WANTS us to become like him. He wants us to center our hearts on him and his kingdom. Way back in Leviticus 11:44 He says as much, “I am the LORD your God; [I want you to] consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy.” Don’t misunderstand. Even in our unholy state God still loves us. He loves us as we are.

A second thing we need to know is that it’s not easy to become Godly. In comparison to becoming Godly —becoming a Christian is an easy thing. Conversion—where I was dead in sin but now am alive in Christ—is an astounding miracle, no question. But the miracle of godliness, theologically we call that sanctification is infinitely more difficult. Because

with that, God not only makes me alive in Christ, He makes me alive as Christ. Mark Buchanan says, “Conversion makes spiritually dead people alive. God pulls that off in a blink. Sanctification makes godless people Godly. God typically uses a lifetime to accomplish that.”

This is why the last part we studied last week, perseverance, is so important. To become Godly, you must learn to hang in there no matter what because Godliness does indeed take an entire lifetime. It’s a day after day after day thing. Every day all year long for a lifetime we have to learn to say no to self and yes to God. Every day we are called to put off our sinful attitudes and put on Godliness. Paul said it this way to the Ephesian Christians in 4:22-24, “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” James said it this way, “We must let perseverance finish its work so that we may be mature and complete not lacking anything.” (James 1:4) The Apostle Paul recognized this truth in his own life. In the context of his desire to know Christ and to become like Him he said, “Not that I have already obtained this or have already been made perfect, but I press on...I persevere...[no matter how hard it is] I keep on trying to become Godly.”(Philippians 3:12) This principle of godliness is what Peter is talking about in our text, when in verse 8 he says we must have these qualities in increasing measure. He’s saying that Godliness is not something you get in one lump sum. Rather it is something you get a little more of every day...it is an incremental growth...a step-by-step deal. It’s like the old song we used to sing, “Every day with Jesus is sweeter

than the day before; every day with Jesus I love Him more and more.” Godliness is a process. We become Godly more and more every day in increasing measure.

You might wonder why God is set up this way. I think it’s both because it honors our free will but also because it keeps us relating to God. It keeps you and me coming back to Him every day—day after day—seeking His help, asking for His power and guidance as we pour our hearts out to Him. And, that’s what God wants. He wants a relationship. You see, the Christian life is not a performance on our part. It’s an on-going, on-growing relationship with God...a relationship in which we gradually become more and more like Him. This means we need to evaluate our progress from time to time. Are you more Godly today than you were last year? Would you say that in 2008 you have become more or less like our Heavenly Father? It is said that Ben Franklin made a list of 13 virtues and he created a graph in a notebook so that he could rate himself each day on each area and chart his progress. You might want to take these 8 garments of grace and do that yourself every day....as a way of seeing if you are becoming more or less Godly. In fact, you might want to take it a bit further and invite the constructive criticism of the people who are closest to you. Ask the people who observe you day in and day out, “Do I ‘look’ more like God this year than I did last year? The truth is others can see the degree of Godliness in our life. I mean, this particular garment of grace shows because it’s not just an inner attitude. It’s also a visible way of life. It’s something you put on that all people can see.

In 1st Peter 3:15 it says, “Always be prepared to give an answer for those who ask...” Remember that verse? Well—implicit in this command is the fact that godly people live in such a way that they arouse curiosity. Like light shining in a dark place, they live so

visibly different from the ungodly world around them that their lifestyle provokes questions. Well, in this popular verse, Peter says that this visible difference can be summed up in one word, HOPE. Godly people live in hope and offer hope. In situations where others would complain or panic or give up...Godly people boldly embrace hope...and this makes people wonder. They wonder—what is the reason or rationale behind the hope-filled way that you as a Christian face the difficulties of life on this fallen world? And more than that—Christians who put on Godliness are always ready to tell people about their hope. They should always be prepared to answer the kinds of questions that spring from people who see their hope-filled lifestyle, always ready to tell people about the God they are striving to become more and more like....the God Who gives us a HOPE that is steadfast and sure.

One reason Godliness shows or displays hope is that it has value for all of life. It's as Paul puts it in 1st Timothy 4:8-9, "Physical training is of some value, but Godliness has value for ALL things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come." You know, we are healthier and wealthier in America than any culture in the history of the world but ironically, at the same time we also have more emotional and mental disorders, more addictions and more syndromes than any culture. According to the World Values Survey quoted in the March 2004 issue of Christianity Today, the United States ranks a poor 16th among the world's 65 happiest countries—16th! You would think that with all our wealth we would have been number one. But—no—that distinction goes to Nigeria—a nation that is one of the poorest in the world....ranking 140th when it comes to economic health. How do you explain this? I mean, how can a country of great poverty beat us so

soundly when it comes to happiness? How can those poor people be so much more happy than we are? Well, I think it's because we look for joy in things and one blessing of their poverty is the fact that the Nigerians have not been able to make this mistake. Things have not blinded them to what is really important—so in a very real sense when it comes to emotional or spiritual health, they are in a better place than we are.

Have you ever heard about the business executive who boarded the New Orleans to Washington train? He was a very heavy sleeper and needed to be reawakened in order to get off the train in Atlanta about five o'clock in the morning. He had a very important business meeting in Atlanta so he couldn't afford to miss his stop. He found a porter and told him, "I want you to wake me in time to get off the train at 5 o'clock...in Atlanta. Now I'm a very heavy sleeper, and it doesn't matter if I fret or fuss over what you do—you MUST put me off the train in Atlanta. Make me wake up! Make me get off!" But the next morning, he woke up about 9AM and the train had long since passed Atlanta. He located the porter and really poured it on with all sorts of abusive language, almost attacking the poor guy bodily. After the angry passenger left, an observer said to the porter, "How could you just stand there and take that kind of talk from that man?" The porter looked up rather sheepishly and replied, "That guy's ranting and raving is nothing. You should have seen the guy I put off the train in Atlanta." That's the problem with a lot of folks in the U.S.. We've gotten off at the wrong "station." Our priorities are askew. Our affluence has caused us to focus on things. Our lives are unsettled and unhappy because we aren't pursuing the right thing. That is to say, we aren't putting on Godliness...this character trait that has value in all things. We are looking for joy and fulfillment in all the wrong places.

With all this in mind I want to suggest three basic PRINCIPLES OF GODLINESS and here's the first.

**First, Love begets a likeness between the one doing the loving and the object beloved.** A mind filled with the love of Christ will be changed into His image and likeness.” This is why those people in this dog food contest looked so much like their beloved pets. This is why children play dress up and wear their parent's clothes. We tend to emulate those we love. And our love for God—our admiration...our awe —of Him...well, it is what compels us to strive to be more and more like Him. Unfortunately, the fact is too often our motives as Christians are too worldly, self-centered rather than God-centered. We do good—but because we want to maintain our reputation before others, or because we want to feel good about ourselves. We may even seek to live a good life because that ethic was instilled in us from childhood. But genuine Godliness is motivated not by our upbringing or by our desire to look good...but rather by our devotion to our Heavenly Father.

Here's a second principle we need to embrace if we are to put on this part of the dress code. **The POWER required for putting on Godliness comes from God Himself.**

This is the “How” of Godliness. As Peter says in verse 3, “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness.” Perhaps more than anyone in Scripture, the Apostle Paul recognized this because he wrote about it so many times.

- In 2nd Corinthians 3:5 he says, “We are not competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.”

- In Colossians 1:29 he says, “To this end I labor, struggling with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me.”
- And in Philippians 4:13 he says, “I can do everything through Him Who gives me strength.”

Now think about that for a moment. The Apostle Paul was one of the best educated men in the world of his day. He obviously had incredible, “stand out in the crowd” charisma and talent, yet even he said over and over again that anything GOOD in him had its source in the Lord’s power. The Christian is not like an automobile with a self-contained power source; rather, he is like an electric motor that must be constantly connected to an outside current for its power.

We’ve talked about the why and the how of Godliness...but what about the “who.” What model is there for us to follow when it comes to putting on this part of the dress code? Well, I would answer that by saying...**The EMBODIMENT of Godliness is Jesus.**

If you need an example to follow—a model to look to—look to Jesus—because as God in the flesh He is literally the perfect embodiment of “eusebia.” Shortly after WWII came to a close, Europe began picking up the pieces. If you’ve seen the pictures taken back then you know that much of the Old Country was ravaged by war and was in ruins. Perhaps the saddest sight of all was that of orphaned children starving in the streets of those war-torn cities. There’s an old story that tells of an American soldier who was making his way back to the barracks in London. As he turned the corner in his jeep, he spotted a little boy with his nose pressed to the window of a pastry shop. Inside, the cook was kneading dough for a

fresh batch of doughnuts. The hungry boy stared in silence, with his nose pressed against the window, drooling and watching the cook's every move. The soldier pulled his jeep to the curb, stopped, got out, and said, "Son, would you like some of those?" The boy was startled but blurted out, "Oh...yeah...I would!" The American stepped inside and bought a dozen, put them in a bag and walked back to where the lad was standing in the foggy cold of the London morning. He smiled, held out his bag and said simply, "Here you are." As the soldier turned to walk away, he felt a tug on his coat. He looked back and heard the child ask quietly, "Mister...are you God?" Have you acted in such a way that you looked like God? Have your actions made anyone feel like God was near and at work? If not, why not? Please pray with me.

Father God, as we sit in this sanctuary, I ask that You would help each of us to feel Your great love...and as we do, I also ask that You would look deep into the life of each person present. Help us to feel Your gaze as You shine the light of Your truth on the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts. Show us the ways we need to change in order to do a better job of bearing Your likeness. Empower us to surrender our perceptions and plans to Your control...such that we become a more obedient body—a body You use to love the world in tangible ways. Help us to live such that we are each recognized as Your children. Speak to us now and tell us of those decisions—both public and private that we need to make in order to more fully join You in Your great work. I ask all this in Jesus' name.

AMEN