

Godliness Through Jesus Christ

Described

Godliness is a type of life which is centred on God, involving reverence, fear of and devotion to Him and resulting in right conduct.

Godliness explained

The topic of godliness is sadly often neglected in modern times in many churches. How contrary this is to what the Apostles Paul and Peter taught and practiced! As you will see in the following, these two “lions” of the Church often stressed the importance of godliness. 1 Timothy 2:2 refers to living a “*life in all godliness*”. Under the New Covenant, living a godly life:

- must be done through our spiritual union with Jesus Christ by His Spirit. 2 Timothy 3:12 refer to living “*godly in Christ Jesus*”.
- is something which is a result of God’s *unmerited grace* operating in our lives. Titus 2:11-12 states: “*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.*” Living a godly life *does not merit* God’s grace or salvation but instead is a *result* or *fruit* of His grace.
- is to be done *through God’s power*. 2 Peter 1:2-3 says: “*Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue.*”
- is based on *knowing God and Jesus Christ intimately* (see 2 Peter 1:2-3 and 6-8).
- is something which we must *eagerly make every effort* to see manifested in our lives. 2 Peter 1:5-6 says: “*...giving all diligence, add...to perseverance godliness.*” In Greek, the word “*diligence*” here is a form of the word “*spoude*” which means “to be eager to do something, with the implication of readiness to expend energy and effort”.¹ In 1 Timothy 6:11, Paul says “*pursue...godliness.*”
- is what we must continually *train* ourselves to be through God’s power. 1 Timothy 4:7-8 commands: “*...exercise yourself rather to godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.*” In Greek, the word “*exercise*” in verse 7 above means “to train the body or mind”.²
- involves having a heart set on doing His will in daily living.

¹ Louw and Nida, page 298.

² Vine, page 216.

- expresses itself in having *godly sorrow* about our known sins which leads to *repentance* and salvation. 2 Corinthians 7:10 says: “**For godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation...**”
- is closely related to living a *holy* life. 2 Peter 3:11 refers to believers manifesting “**holy conduct and godliness**”.
- doing *good works* each day by the power of the Holy Spirit. In 1 Timothy 2:10, Paul refers to “**professing godliness, with good works**”.
- is closely linked with receiving *sound Biblical doctrines*. 1 Timothy 6:3 says: “**If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness.**”
- is linked to being *content* with God’s natural blessings to us and *not being greedy* (see 1 Timothy 6:6-10).
- will result in *persecution* by others. 2 Timothy 3:12 says: “**Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.**”
- relates to having good *Biblical family values* (see 1 Timothy 5:4).

It is possible to have a false “*form of godliness*” in which we are ruled by many different sins (see 2 Timothy 3:1-5). In 1 Timothy 6:3-5, Paul warned us of false teachers who use godliness as a means of emptying the wallets of their listeners. In 2 Peter 2:1-22, Peter compares the lives of the godly with false teachers in the church who live ungodly lives.

Relevant Greek words

In the Greek New Testament, the main words used for “*godliness*” are “*eusebeia*” and “*theosebeia*”. The adjective “*godly*” is “*eusebes*” and the adverb “*godly*” is “*eusebos*”.

“*Eusebeia*” means “*behaviour reflecting correct religious beliefs and attitudes*”³ or “*reverential feeling...devotion, godliness*”.⁴ “*Eusebeia*” is used in Acts 3:12, 1 Timothy 2:2, 3:16, 4:7, 4:8, 6:3, 6:5, 6:6, 6:11, 2 Timothy 3:5, Titus 1:1, 2 Peter 1:3, 1:6, 1:7 and 3:11. “*Theosebeia*” means “*the fear or reverence of God*”⁵ and is used in 1 Timothy 2:10.

The word “*eusebes*” means “*godly, reverent*”⁶ or “*reverence manifested in actions*”⁷ and is found in 2 Peter 2:9.

“*Eusebos*” means relating to God “*in a godly manner*”⁸ or “*being devoted to a proper expression of religious beliefs*”⁹. “*Eusebos*” is found in 2 Timothy 3:12 and Titus 2:12.

Godliness can be understood by comparing it to its opposite – ungodliness. In Greek, the word “*ungodliness*” is “*asebeia*”, the adjective “*ungodly*” is “*asebes*” and the adverb “*ungodly*” is “*asebeo*”. “*Asebeia*” means “*godless, impiety (in thought and act)*”¹⁰ and is used in Romans 1:18, 11:26, Titus 2:12, Jude 15 and Jude 18.

³ Louw and Nida, page 532.

⁴ Perschbacher, pages 182-183.

⁵ Vine, page 273.

⁶ Bauer, page 326.

⁷ Vine, page 273.

⁸ Bauer, page 326.

⁹ Louw and Nida, page 532.

¹⁰ Bauer, page 114.

The word “asebes” means “ungodly, *without reverence* for God, not merely irreligious but acting” contrary to “God’s demands”.¹¹ “Asebes” is used in Romans 4:5, 5:6, 1 Timothy 1:9, 1 Peter 4:18, 2 Peter 2:5, 3:7, Jude 4 and Jude 15 (twice). “Asebeo” means “to be or live ungodly” in 2 Peter 2:6 or “to commit ungodly deeds” in Jude 15.¹²

It is obvious from the above definitions that:

- a) the godly have *fear of or reverence and devotion* for God and *correct religious beliefs* which result in *godly behaviour*.
- b) the ungodly do not have the fear of the Lord and live in ways contrary to His demands.

Bible Study Questions

1. Describe godliness.
2. What does 2 Timothy 3:12 and 2 Peter 1:2-3 teach about godliness?
3. Explain what 1 Peter 1:5-6, 1 Timothy 4:7-8 and 6:11 reveal about godliness.
4. What does 2 Corinthians 7:10 show that godly sorrow about our known sins, will lead to?
5. Discuss what 2 Peter 3:11 and 1 Timothy 2:10 teach about godliness.
6. With what does 1 Timothy 6:3 link godliness?
7. Explain what are the false types of godliness which Paul referred to in 1 Timothy 6:3-5 and 2 Timothy 3:1-5.
8. What two main things can be drawn from the meanings of the Greek New Testament words for godliness and ungodliness?

¹¹ Vine, page 651.

¹² Ibid.