

THE PURSUIT OF GODLINESS

2 Peter 1:3-5

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The title of the sermon today is “The Pursuit of Godliness.”

The Bible commands us in 1 Timothy 6:11 to pursue godliness.

What is godliness, why should we pursue it, and how do we pursue it? And what does it mean to pursue godliness?

Today we are going to study what just might be the most comprehensive passage about the topic of godliness in the Bible. If you want to learn about godliness, then this is the best place to look.

Turn with me to **2 Peter 1:3-5**. Let’s read the passage, and then we’ll discuss it.

3 His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 By these he has given us very great and precious promises, so that through them you may share in the divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire. 5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge,

This passage has **six truths about godliness**.

SIX TRUTHS ABOUT GODLINESS

1. It is God’s will for you to be godly.

Godliness is not an option. Look at **2 Peter 1:3**. “His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness.” Through God’s power we have everything required for godliness. The implication is that God wants us to be godly.

This is reiterated in verses 5-7. “5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge, 6 knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with godliness, 7 godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.” We are commanded to supplement, or add to our faith the virtues of goodness, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, etc. Godliness is a command.

Notice how in verse 5 it says to “supplement your faith,” or add to your faith the following seven virtues, including godliness. In other words, godliness is more than mere belief, and God wants your religion to move beyond belief in your actions and attitude.

True Christianity is more than merely orthodoxy, or believing the right things; it is orthopraxy, living the right way.

Some people say that they are Christians because they believe in a set of doctrines. But that doesn't make you a Christian. True Christianity, true discipleship, is about belief and behavior.

If you believe like a Christian but are not aiming to live like a Christian, then you don't have true Christianity.

Again, godliness is a command. It is God's will for you.

Malachi 2:15 says that not only does God want you to be godly, but God's goal for marriage is godly offspring. If you are a parent, don't just strive for godliness, but strive to raise up godly children.

1 Timothy 2:1-2 commands us to pray for our political leaders, for them to lead in such a way that would give us the liberty to live in all godliness.

1 Timothy 2:2-3 says that godliness pleases God.

1 Timothy 4:7 commands us to train ourselves in godliness.

1 Timothy 6:11 commands us to pursue godliness.

Titus 2:12 says that we are instructed to live in a godly way in this present age.

2 Peter 3:11 commands us to be people of godliness.

So if godliness is a command, then let me ask you two questions. Are you living a godly life? Are you pursuing godliness? The answer to those questions should be Yes.

2. You have everything you need to grow in godliness.

2 Peter 1:3 “His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness.” God has given us all that we need for growth in godliness.

What has God given us to enable us to grow in godliness? **Eight resources.**

2 Peter 1:3 says that “His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness.” What resources has God given us to enable us to grow in godliness?

First, a new heart. This is called regeneration, and it happens the moment you get saved. God gives you a new heart with the desire and the power to please Him. **Ezekiel 36:25-27** “26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will place my Spirit within you and cause you to follow my statutes and carefully observe my ordinances.”

Second, the indwelling Holy Spirit. The moment you get saved, God places the Holy Spirit inside of you to live. **John 14:16-17** “16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever. 17 He is the Spirit of truth. The world is unable to receive him because it doesn’t see him or know him. But you do know him, because he remains with you and will be in you.” The Holy Spirit is the one who sanctifies us (1 Pt 1:2). He is the one who helps us grow in godliness.

Third, the word of God. We also grow through the Bible. **John 17:17** “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.”

Fourth, the gift of prayer. We can pray for godliness, and God will hear us and help us. **John 14:13** “Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”

Fifth, the encouragement of the church. **Ephesians 4:16 (NLT)** “He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.”

Sixth, the discipline of God. God uses our suffering – no matter the source or the type – to grow us. **Hebrews 12:7, 11** “7 Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline? 11 No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”

Seventh, the intercession of the Holy Spirit. The Bible says that the Holy Spirit prays for us to grow in godliness. **Romans 8:26** “In the same way the Spirit also helps us in our weakness, because we do not know what to pray for as we should, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with unspoken groanings.”

Eighth, the intercession of Christ. The Bible says that Christ is also praying for our growth. **Romans 8:34** “Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is the one who died, but even more, has been raised; he also is at the right hand of God and intercedes for us.”

If you have everything you need to grow in godliness, then you can grow in godliness. It is possible. Some Christians, after failing in their quest for godliness, get discouraged and give up, assuming that growth is impossible. It’s not. You have everything you need. You can grow.

3. You have everything you need for godliness through the knowledge of Christ.

How do you know if you have all the resources you need for godliness? How do you know that the Holy Spirit is living in you, and working in you, and that you have a new heart, and that Christ and the Holy Spirit are interceding for you? Because these resources are given to everyone who is saved.

2 Peter 1:3 “His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us.”

All the resources that are required for godliness are given through the knowledge of him who called us.

This phrase, “the knowledge of him who called us,” is referring to salvation. It is the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

How do I know?

Because it says not only that we have everything required for godliness through the knowledge of God, but we have everything required for life, that is, eternal life, through the knowledge of God.

John 17:3 “This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and the one you have sent —Jesus Christ.”

If you are saved, then you “know” Jesus Christ; you “know” God in a way that unbelievers do not. This is not a mere intellectual knowledge; it is an intimate, experiential knowledge. And if you have saving knowledge God and Jesus Christ, if you are saved, then you have everything you need for godliness. You were given it all at the moment of salvation.

Here’s what this means. If you are saved, then you don’t need a second experience to be godly.

Some Christian denominations, in the tradition of John Wesley, teach that you need a second experience to have the power for godliness.

Methodists call it entire sanctification, or Christian perfection.

The idea is that if you want the power to overcome voluntary, willful sins, then you need this second experience, called entire sanctification, or Christian perfection.

There are several steps that you need to take:

You have to believe that this gift is real, and that it is available to you.

You need to forsake all known sin in your life.

You need to surrender yourself completely to God's control and leadership.

You need to pray for it.

And then you need to have faith that God loves you and will give this to you.

If you follow these steps, then you will have an experience with God that will break the power of sin in your life and enable you to walk in complete obedience.

Some teach that this experience will be something that you feel, and others teach that it may or may not be felt.

Still others, the Pentecostals and charismatics, who are breakoffs from the Wesleyan tradition, don't call this experience entire sanctification or Christian perfection, but the Baptism with the Holy Spirit.

They believe that you need a second experience after salvation in which the Holy Spirit empowers you.

You receive it in pretty much the same way as entire sanctification; the same steps apply;

but the evidence of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is speaking in tongues, and sometimes other outward phenomena, such as being slain in the Spirit, or uncontrollable laughter, or uncontrollable shaking, etc.

According to many Pentecostals and Charismatics, if you do not experience speaking in tongues and other outward phenomena, then you have not been Spirit Baptized, and you don't have the power you need for godly living.

So Christians in the Wesleyan tradition such as Methodists, the Church of the Nazarene, Pentecostals, and charismatics believe that you don't have everything required for holiness just because you are saved. You need a second experience, subsequent to salvation. There are two classes of Christians, if you will. There are the truly spiritual, those who have received the second blessing, or entire sanctification, or the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and there are those regular Christians.

But that's not what the Bible says. 2 Peter 1:3 says "His divine power has given us everything required for life [eternal] and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us."

These words are in the past tense, because it is a reality in the past for everyone who is saved. The moment God saved you, He gave you everything required for godliness.

So here's the application. In your pursuit of godliness, don't go chasing spiritual experiences.

The Bible commands us to pursue godliness, not spiritual experiences.

You don't need entire sanctification, or Christian perfection, or the baptism with the Holy Spirit, or some second blessing.

You have all of the Holy Spirit that you need, and that you are ever going to get. He indwelt you the moment you were saved; that was your baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Don't go chasing spiritual, mystical experiences. That's not what godliness is about.

You already have everything required. You aren't missing anything.

4. Godliness means sharing in the divine nature.

Now let's get into what godliness is, or what it means. We are talking about the pursuit of godliness, but we haven't clearly defined it yet. The good thing is that this passage defines it for us very clearly.

2 Peter 1:4 "By these he has given us very great and precious promises, so that through them you may share in the divine nature...."

Let me walk you through this verse.

"By these," by God's glory and goodness referred to in the previous verse.

"He has given us very great and precious promises." What promises? The promises to give us all the resources we need for godliness.

"So that through them," through the resources that God gives to every Christian,

"you may share in the divine nature."

The purpose of these resources is to give us power for godliness, and here it describes godliness as sharing in the divine nature.

What is the divine nature? It is the character of God; the character of Christ. That is what godliness is – God-likeness; Christ-likeness.

We are not to share in God's divine nature by becoming little gods; we are to share God's divine nature by developing His character.

Over and over in Scripture we are commanded to imitate God and Christ.

Ephesians 5:1 “Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children.”

1 John 2:6 “The one who says he remains in him should walk just as he walked.”

And then in verses 5-7 Peter is going to get even more specific by mentioning seven Christlike virtues to cultivate: Goodness, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, brotherly affection, and love.

Now notice that Peter mentions godliness a second time in verses 6 and 7.

He is basically saying that to become godly, cultivate godliness.

In other words, godliness has two different meanings in the Bible.

On the one hand, it can mean Christ-likeness, or God-likeness. To become godly is to become Christ-like. It is an umbrella word that covers all other Christian virtues.

But then there is a more specific kind of godliness; the virtue of godliness. We’ll talk more about that in a few weeks. But the virtue of godliness is sometimes translated piety, or devotion. It is a close relationship with God that leads to life that is pleasing to Him.

How can you tell which type of godliness a verse is referring to?

When “godliness” is in a list of virtues, like verses 5-7, it is safe to assume that it is referring to the virtue of godliness.

When godliness is found by itself, as in verse 3, it is probably referring to being God-like or Christ-like.

For example, **1 Timothy 4:7-8** “7 But have nothing to do with pointless and silly myths. Rather, train yourself in godliness. 8 For the training of the body has limited benefit, but godliness is beneficial in every way, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.” In this passage, godliness is

by itself, so it is probably referring to the umbrella meaning of God-likeness or Christ-likeness.

But then **1 Timothy 6:11** “But you, man of God, flee from these things, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.” In this context godliness is found in a list of virtues, so we can see that is referring not to God-likeness in general, but the specific virtue of godliness, or piety, or devotion. We’ll talk more about how to cultivate godliness in a few weeks.

5. The benefit of godliness is escaping the corruption of the world.

Godliness has many benefits, and we’ll get into them in more detail in a few weeks, but this passage mentions one big one in verse 4.

2 Peter 1:4 “By these he has given us very great and precious promises, so that through them you may share in the divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire.”

The word “corruption” in Greek is *phthora*. It is used nine times in the New Testament. Six times it is translated corruption, and three times it is translated destruction. It means decay, ruin.

In other words, Peter isn’t saying that the benefit of godliness is that we get to merely escape the sins of the world, but that by living godly lives we get to escape the destruction, ruin, and decay that are the natural consequences of sin.

We should be motivated to be more and more godly because the alternative is to be sinful, and sin leads to suffering.

I wrote down some of types of corruption that are caused by sin: Depression, anxiety, stress, suicide, murder, violence, abuse, destructive addictions, self-caused illnesses and diseases, abortion, adultery, divorce, broken homes, fear of death, a wasted life, self-induced financial problems, discontentment and unhappiness, and relational strife. I could go on and on. Sin leads to suffering, and that’s what we get to avoid by become godly.

Life is hard enough as it is. But when we live in sin it makes life so much harder than it has to be. I'll just give you one example.

Sickness and disease are a fact of life, for the godly and the ungodly.

But when you live in sin, you can cause your body to experience much more sickness and disease than is necessary.

By not taking care of your health, neglecting to exercise, neglecting to eat right, smoking, drinking, drugs, promiscuity, etc., you can destroy your body very fast.

But by being godly, which includes honoring God with your body, and sexual purity, and sobriety, and self-control, you can avoid most of the common illnesses and sicknesses that are plaguing mankind today.

Godliness is good for you. A godly life is the best life.

This is what Jesus meant in John 10:10 when He said that He came to give us a full and meaningful life; an abundant life.

This is what 1 John 5:3 means when it says that God's commands are not burdensome.

This is what 1 Timothy 4:8 means when it says that godliness is beneficial in every way, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

God made you, and He made the world. He made the universe. So He knows what is best for you. Living a godly life works. It leads to a good life.

Godliness is best for your relationships, your physical health, your emotions, your mind, your finances, and your relationship with God.

Living an ungodly life does not work. It leads all sorts of problems – emotional, physical, spiritual, relational, mental, sexual, etc.

6. Growth in godliness requires making every effort.

Now we're getting to the practical part of the sermon.

If God has given us everything required for godliness, then why aren't all Christians godly? Because godliness requires making every effort.

2 Peter 1:4-5 "4 By these he has given us very great and precious promises, so that through them you may share in the divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire. 5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith"

Notice the words, "make every effort." What does that mean? It means make every effort. The KJV says "giving all diligence." Commentator William Barclay said, "We must bend all our energies.... In the Christian life the supreme effort of man must cooperate with the grace of God."

So here's what this means. On the one hand, cultivating godliness is not a passive process. It is not a one-sided operation. It is not all of God and none of you.

God gives you the resources, but then you have to do your part, making every effort.

It's like a boxing manager. A boxing manager can give his boxer everything he needs to succeed; proper training, nutrition, skills, scouting report, motivation, sparring partners, but for the boxer to become a champion, he has to do his part. He has to make every effort.

God has given us everything we need; He has done His part. Now we must do our part.

On other hand, cultivating godliness is not easy.

It requires making every effort.

It requires bending all of your energies. It requires your very best.

Over and over again the Bible tells us this is what the Christian life requires.

Luke 9:23 says to deny yourself and take up your cross.

Luke 14:33 says if you do not renounce all of your possessions you cannot be a disciple of Christ.

Luke 9:24 says if you want to save your life you must lose it.

Luke 14:26 says that if you want to be a disciple of Christ you must hate your family, and even hate your own life.

Matthew 5:29-30 says if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away; and if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.

Romans 12:1 says to offer yourself as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

Mark 12:30 says to love God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.

Hebrews 12:1 says to lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us.

1 Timothy 6:11 says to run from evil and to pursue godliness. That word "pursue" means to strive for, to try your best, to chase after.

Here's the point. It is not merely that you *should* make every effort, but that you *must*.

It's the only way to become godly.

Your flesh is so sinful, and this world is so sinful, and the devil is so crafty, that godliness requires making every effort.

God isn't just saying that He is worthy of your best; He is saying that achieving godliness is going to take your best.

Becoming godly is not easy. It takes everything thing you've got.

And now we're getting to the heart of the matter.

The only thing preventing you from godliness is your effort.

The difference between godly Christians and worldly Christians is effort.

You are as godly as you want to be. You are as close to God as you want. You are as Christ-like and spiritually mature as you want to be. It comes down to your effort.

What kind of effort is required for godliness? Let me give you **five basics**.

First, Bible study.

You need to know your Bible. **John 17:17** "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." **God grows us through Bible study. But it's not enough to learn your Bible. You need to be in your Bible constantly. **Psalm 1:2** "Instead, his delight is in the Lord's instruction, and he meditates on it day and night."**

Second, prayer.

I'm not talking about praying at meal time.

You need to become a prayer warrior.

Luke 18:1 says to pray always.

Ephesians 6:18 says to pray at all times.

Colossians 4:2 says to devote yourself to prayer.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 says to pray constantly.

What are you praying for? Everything you need, but first and foremost, pray for godliness.

This is why we are always emphasizing the importance of a daily quiet time. Set aside the first hour of your day for prayer and Bible study.

Third, obedience.

Cultivating godliness comes down to good old fashioned obedience. There's simply no substitute.

For most Christians, the thing that's holding them back from spiritual growth is not a lack of knowledge, but a lack of obedience.

They already know the next step they need to take. They need to stop smoking. They need to stop looking at porn. They need to stop cursing. They need to stop stealing. They need to stop gossiping. To stop living with their girlfriend or boyfriend. To stop having sex before marriage.

The next step is to obey.

James 1:22 "But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."

Fourth, fellowship.

You need to be in church. You need to sit under the preaching of the word. You need praise and worship. You need service. You need relationships with other believers.

Hebrews 10:24-25 "24 And let us watch out for one another to provoke love and good works, 25 not neglecting to gather together,

as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.”

Fifth, separation.

To overcome sin and temptation you have to separate yourself from people and situations that tempt you to sin.

1 Corinthians 15:33 “Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good character.”

In other words, don't think you are so strong that bad company won't affect you. It will.

You need to separate yourself from temptation.

What does this look like?

Break up with your non-Christian boyfriend. Find a different group of friends. Find a different place to hang out. Get rid of the internet at home. Get rid of cable. Stop watching shows that tempt you.

CONCLUSION

Thomas Edison is the greatest inventor of the modern age, acquiring 1,093 patents. He said, “Failure is really a matter of conceit. People don't work hard because, in their conceit, they imagine they'll succeed without ever making an effort. Most people believe that they'll wake up some day and find themselves rich. Actually they've got it half right, because eventually they do wake up.”

Spiritual growth is a lot like that. Failure to grow is a matter of conceit. People don't make every effort because they think they'll grow without it. They just that one day they'll wake up mature.

It doesn't work like that. Spiritual growth takes all you have. And it is worth all you have.

God has given us everything we need for godliness. The only thing preventing you is effort. Make every effort.

So let me close with some questions about effort.

Are you godly?

Are you making every effort to grow in godliness?

If not, why?

What adjustments do you need to make to begin making every effort?

How can I help?