

Lesson 10

Psalms 15, 63, 97, 112, 141; Prov. 9, 16, 24

Developing Godliness

For those of you who can recall and stayed awake during my last lecture on God our Salvation, you might remember that I began with a quest to define salvation. Today's lesson is titled, "Developing Godliness," so I thought why not start with a definition of "Godliness?" Last time, I went to the Hebrew dictionary and pulled up the Hebrew definitions of the word salvation as used in the selected Psalms.

To define "Godliness," I'm going to go a different route. In John 3:16, Jesus calls Himself God's "*only begotten Son*." The word "begotten" is an important one. Simplistically, when someone "begets" another, they can only beget the same being or species. For example, a dog can only beget a dog. A dog cannot beget a cat. A frog can only beget a frog – it can't beget a lizard. Now apply the word "begotten" to God – that means God can only beget God. Therefore, Jesus Christ is a co-equal part of the triune Godhead – the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Seeing Jesus as God is a foundational step in a Christian's faith. With this truth in mind, when looking to define "Godliness," we can equate that word with "Christ-likeness." They are the same thing.

I won't speak for you, but substituting Christ-likeness for Godliness changes my concept of what Godliness means. Without this comparison, I can think of Godliness as us walking around in white robes, strumming harps, and feeling holier than thou. I agree with Greg Laurie's thought that, "*When we're too heavenly minded, we're no earthly good.*" So, is this angelic image the right picture of Godliness? Nope.

Another image of Godliness might be us standing on a pious pedestal with our black robes of judgment pronouncing condemnation on sinners – and even our fellow brothers and sisters. For those who do the latter, apparently, they skipped over the verse that says there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. I have a gavel, a symbol of judgment, that is in my home office, and inscribed on it is, "This is My job – not yours. – God." Then it quotes Matthew 7:1, which says, "*Judge not, that you be not judged.*" We can conclude that Godliness being judgmental is the wrong interpretation.

Whether it is a judgmental spirit, or other things like unforgiveness or bitterness, these are all things that are anything but Godly or Christ-like. Spiritually, our sin nature was crucified with Christ, but that doesn't mean Satan is going to back-off and not tempt us and look to take away our joy in the Lord. How many of you feel the Lord is not close to you at this moment? My question to you is how much are you pursuing Him or seeking Him? Are you regularly reading His Word? Are you asking for more of His presence through prayer and worship? I'm not trying to put a guilt trip on anyone, but the truth is if you don't pursue God, you shouldn't expect to be feeling His closeness. God still loves you, but just like between two humans, you shouldn't expect more out of a relationship if you're not putting very much into it.

Who is more forgiving? Who is more merciful? Who is fuller of grace? We know the answer to these questions – Jesus. It seems to me that if we spend more time with Him, then I believe these beautiful character traits of Christ are contagious – they will start showing up in our daily lives. Conversely, if we're not spending time with Jesus through His Word, then our sin nature will rear its ugly head. We'll start to see less of His character traits, and more of the above-mentioned non-Christ-like traits.

Jesus, Himself, offers these wonderful promises of His responsiveness to those who sincerely seek or pursue Him:

- Matthew 6:33: “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”
- Matthew 7:7-8: “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.”

In today's reading, we see multiple references to pursuing God. Just a few of them are:

- Psalm 63:1: “You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water.”
- Psalm 63:8: “I cling to you; your right hand upholds me.”
- Psalm 141:8: “But my eyes are fixed on you, Sovereign LORD; in you I take refuge—do not give me over to death.”

As I just noted, there are real promises from Jesus to those who seek Him. Through the Holy Spirit, which is given to us at the time of our confession of faith in Jesus, He is the implementer of the sanctification process – the process of instilling Christ-likeness. One of the Spirit's chief responsibilities is to shape us into the image of Jesus – to make us Godlier or Christ-like. Should we choose to pursue or seek Christ, we'll discover many of His character traits. We come to know God through Jesus. If we don't know Christ, how in the world are we expected to trust Him? For those of you have or had children, would you just blindly hire someone off the internet to babysit them? I would hope not. You get to know them to find out if they can be trusted – if they are reliable. Today's reading reveals several of God's character traits. They include:

- Love
- Righteous
- Wisdom
- Knowledge
- Faithfulness
- Relational
- Sacrifice

1 John 4:8 states it plainly – God is love. The love, though, that the Apostle John is speaking to is agape love – only God or someone who is seeking to live Christ-like through the power of the Holy Spirit can love like this. Today's reading has several references to the nature of agape love.

- Psalm 15:3: “...who does no wrong to a neighbor..”
- Psalm 15:4: “...but honors those who fear the Lord;”
- Psalm 15:5: “who lends money to the poor without interest;”

We also read about righteousness as being a Christ-like character trait. Righteousness is what it says it is – it is a rightness. The idea of a plumb line of rightness is something a lot of people

struggle with – even many Christians. There is a definite right and wrong, and that is defined by God. I personally have found that the reason most people don't want to believe in a singular rightness or ultimate truth is that if such a thing exists, then they are accountable to it. Take that one step farther – not only are they accountable to this rightness and truth, but also, they are accountable to the One who defined the rightness and truth.

Personal accountability is, tragically, a fading mindset in today's world. It's no less true today than what it has been since the Garden of Eden, but Satan has done a masterful job convincing even well-meaning Christians that certain sins clearly defined in Scripture or not applicable today. I believe this watering down of the Word is one of the key components of the eventual fulfillment of the prophecy of the falling away of the church. I can think of few more blatant examples that we are in the end of the end times as the falling away of the church, which, in my mind, is well underway. Listen to Jesus Himself speaking to this very issue in Matthew 7:13-14: "*Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.*"

Our reading speaks to God's character trait of righteousness many times – a few of them are:

- Psalm 97:2: "Clouds and thick darkness surround him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne."
- Psalm 97:6: "The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all peoples see his glory."
- Proverbs 16:8: "Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice."

Another character trait of God's is wisdom. For those of us more "seasoned" Christians, we would like to think we've acquired some wisdom along our respective journeys. The truth, though, is that true wisdom does not come from our experiences and life lessons. Proverbs 9:10 tells us, "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*" Godly wisdom typically confounds earthly wisdom. How many times did Jesus turn the tables on His critics when they would seek to trip Him up? If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and our world is moving farther and farther away from a fear of the Lord, what does that tell you about the kind of wisdom that prevails in today's society? When I hear people seek to defend their unbiblical position, I can't help but to want to say, "Are you even listening to the nonsense your spouting?" Thankfully, the Holy Spirit shuts me up before I blow my witness – at least most of the time. At my age, the muffler is coming off more than I'd like to admit.

As a sidecar to wisdom, God throws in knowledge. Knowledge, by itself, can be dangerous. Without the constraints of the Holy Spirit, we can take the knowledge we get from God and lord it over others. I can't tell you how many times I've been looked down upon by an "ordained" pastor because I didn't have their training. Let's play this out when it comes to Godly knowledge. I just quoted Proverbs 9:10, and knowledge of the Holy one is understanding. If the purpose of Godly knowledge is to bring understanding of God's character, then that knowledge *should* produce a Godly fruit. Remember the fruits of the Spirit, "*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*" (Galatians 5:22-23a) I don't see anything in those words that give us a license to lord our knowledge over others. Knowledge without it being seasoned with God's love is potentially very destructive.

Proverbs 16:6 speaks to one of my favorite components of God's character – His faithfulness. *"Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for; through the fear of the LORD evil is avoided."* This verse is loaded with great promises that come with God's faithfulness. Look at these New Testament verses, and you can see the connection to Proverbs 16:6.

- 1 Corinthians 1:9: "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."
- 2 Thessalonians 3:3: "But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one."
- 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

I don't know about you, but I have no idea why God puts up with me – or pretty much any of us. I can completely relate to the Apostle Paul's words in Romans 7:15: *"For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do."* Satan is very good at tempting our legalistic tendencies to make God's love conditional. God's faithfulness is the answer to the lie that His love for us is based on how "good" we are. Hebrews 13:5 confirms God's faithfulness, *"I will never leave you nor forsake you."*

From the list of character traits I earlier provided, I'm guessing one of them may have caught your eye – He is relational. Proverbs 9:4-5 tells us about God being relational, *"Let all who are simple come to my house!" To those who have no sense she says, "Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed."* God is a relational God. There is a relationship within the Trinity – they are in constant communication with each other. We were created to be in a relationship with God – that's how He designed us. Read through the Gospels, and Jesus was either in fellowship with the Father through prayer, or in fellowship with His disciples and followers. More importantly, He was relational to sinners. We all need to do a check of ourselves and see who we spend our time with. If we're living in a "Christian bubble," then we need to ask God to open up some doors to non-believers that we can minister to. Being relational is absolutely a part of being Christ-like.

The last on the list of Godly traits that are pointed out in today's reading is sacrifice. Only our sin nature would not understand this being a Godly trait. When we are operating in our flesh, we are "me-centric." We're looking to be glorified, served, lifted up, and praised for our alleged awesomeness. In other words, our pride is driving the ship of our lives. What does Proverbs 16:18 warn us about pride? *"Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall."* C.S. Lewis calls pride "the great sin."

Without exception, my greatest failures in my life have pride at their epicenter. I grew up in a very achievement-oriented family. We were "doers" and had respectable positions in society. That was the façade. Inside the façade was a mountain of dysfunction, conditional love, and some truly damaged people. When I finally came face-to-face with my sinfulness at the cross, my entire world was shattered. Everything I thought was true was a lie. More importantly, I realized the cancer of pride. Chuck Smith couldn't have said it better, *"I don't know how anyone can have an ounce of pride if they have had a true encounter with Jesus Christ."* One look at the wounds in His hands and feet – one look at the scars on His brow from the crown of thorns and realizing all of that happened because of my sin, and I'm undone.

I'm currently reading *"The Discipline of Grace"* by Jerry Bridges, and he is a proponent of our teaching ourselves the gospel every day. As ones who are already saved by our faith, this

might be a strange request. The truth is, though, there is so much wisdom in this exhortation. Preaching the gospel to ourselves, if we do it right, reminds us that we are sinners, and that is **only** by the grace of God and His love for us that we can have our countless sins forgiven. For those of you who have been sentenced to listening to me all these years, hopefully, you have picked up there is always a point in every lecture I land at the cross. When nothing else makes sense, I find the heart of God at the cross. And what is one of the first words we think of when we see the cross? – Sacrifice.

The sidecar to sacrificial living is humbleness. Philippians 2:8 tells us, “*And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.*” What is sacrifice? It is the forgoing of what we want in exchange for the betterment of others. Let me say that again. Sacrifice is the forgoing of what we want in exchange for the betterment of others. How much of this are we seeing in the world today? I don’t know about you, but I’m not seeing much. That should come as no surprise as this world is pushing out the concept of God. You remove God from our conscious, and you take away the influence of his Godly or Christ-like traits. What’s left? A world in chaos with each person living solely for their own self-interests.

Our reading offers numerous examples of sacrificial living. Some of them are:

- Psalm 15:4: “....who keeps an oath even when it hurts, and does not change their mind;”
- Psalm 112:5: “...those who are generous and lend freely..”
- Proverbs 16:19: “Better to be lowly in spirit along with the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud.”
- Proverbs 16:32: “Better a patient person than a warrior, one with self-control than one who takes a city.”

There’s an underlying foundation to sacrificial living that few people understand or know, and I believe it is *this* truth that when a Christian really gets and believes, his/her life will truly change. Sacrificial living is completely counter to our sin nature. Remember...its focus is on ourselves. Well, what’s behind that mindset? ‘*God isn’t going to take care of my needs as He promised, so I need to take care of things myself.*’ And what is behind that mindset? – Pride. Our pride thinks that we can better provide for ourselves than God can. That was the lie Satan fed to Adam and Eve in the garden. He implied to them that God was withholding something better for them by having them not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

The underlying foundation to sacrificial living is a complete trust in God’s love and provision. If we can come to a place where, no matter what our circumstances are, God is with us and will ultimately provide His goodness to us, then we can surrender our pride and completely rely on and trust Him. Hopefully, you can follow me on this. As we choose to live sacrificially, we open the door for God to reveal Himself in a new and powerful way – to demonstrate His faithfulness to provide what we need. As we see the evidence of God’s provision, the decision to live sacrificially becomes easier and easier as we find God’s provision to be more satisfying and offer a contentment that can’t be found in our self-provision. This is a beautiful thing, and it is very true.

The problem is we have an enemy who does not want us to live with this kind of faith in God. Satan wants us relying on ourselves because he knows this is where we are most vulnerable – in our pride. When we’re living sacrificially and relying on God to provide for us, then Satan loses his influence on us. When Jesus was tempted by Satan, what was His defense? The Word

of God – for each temptation, Christ responded with Scripture. Jesus showed to us, as a human, the importance of relying on His Word to see us through our trials and temptations. If we’re reading His Word, we are seeing that there is great power in it, and in that power, there is a sacrificial mindset. This was the mindset Jesus had in His entire life – to live sacrificially – knowing not His will, but the Father’s will be done. In my mind, sacrificial living, is one of the purest testimonies to living a Godly, or Christ-like, life.

There is another common theme in this reading, and there is absolutely a connection to Godly living. That is the tongue – our speech. Our words can either be source of light or instruments of darkness. Our tongues often reveal what’s in our heart. Jesus said in Matthew 15:11: “*it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person.*” Whatever good deeds we do, no matter how much reading of the Bible we do or how much prayer we enter into, nothing can invalidate someone’s witness to being Christ-like than what comes out of our mouth. Words *do* matter. Let’s take a look at some verses from today’s reading about out tongue.

- Psalm 15:2-3: “...who speaks the truth from their heart; whose tongue utters no slander,and casts no slur on others;”
- Psalm 141:3: “Set a guard over my mouth, LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips.”
- Proverbs 16:24: “Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.”
- Proverbs 24:26: “An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips.”

I must confess guarding my tongue is one of my greatest challenges. I’m always on the lookout to interject what I think is something funny, when if I were to just pause and not just blurt it out, I wouldn’t get myself into trouble. Unfortunately, I fail at this more often than I’d like to admit. I’ve had my foot stuck in my mouth so many times, you would think the taste of shoe leather would get old. I’ve been around people who are always seasoning conversation with positivity and hope, and it is refreshing – as Proverbs 16:4 says, “gracious words are a honeycomb.” Conversely, when I’m around negative people always complaining, it brings me down, and I find myself wanting to ask people like this, “Is there anything in your life you can be positive about?” Christ-like living must include a proper management of our tongues.

So, we’ve equated Godly living to Christ-likeness. We’ve taken from our reading numerous character traits of God that, with the help of the Holy Spirit, move us towards these traits becoming ours. Finally, we’ve seen that a critical component to Godly living is our speech. What’s left? In a perfect world, merely living this way should be an act of gratitude, love, and worship to God for all He’s done. That should be enough motivation for us to pursue such a lifestyle. Our reading, though, offers numerous benefits of a life lived in a Godly or Christ-like manner. Check out these promises of fruit to the one who chooses the Godly life.

- Psalm 63:8: “...your right hand upholds me.”
- Psalm 97:10: “he guards the lives of his faithful ones and delivers them from the hand of the wicked.”
- Psalm 112:1: “Blessed are those who fear the LORD, who find great delight in his commands.”
- Psalm 112:4: “..Even in darkness light dawns for the upright”

- Psalm 112:6-7: “Good will come to those who are generous and lend freely, who conduct their affairs with justice. Surely the righteous will never be shaken; they will be remembered forever.”
- Proverbs 9:12: “If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you;”
- Proverbs 16:3: “Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and he will establish your plans.”
- Proverbs 24:16: “for though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again, but the wicked stumble when calamity strikes.”

There are some wonderful promises in these verses, and they are all true. The problem for many of us in today’s world, why aren’t we seeing these in our lives? People seeking to live a Godly or Christ-like life are vilified as haters and out of touch. The level of persecution on the church is at one of its peaks in history, and I hate to tell you this, but it’s only going to get worse. I know there are some people who are calling for one last revival before the Lord returns, but that just isn’t what the Bible says. Could God be gracious and allow another harvest? – Absolutely. While I would love to see this, for me, personally, I’m choosing to take God at His Word and rejoice that we are near His return.

There is a lot of pain in this world today – and especially in the church. I know many of you are really struggling right now – be it with your health, your relationships, your finances, or any number of things. When we see this list of promises of fruit of Christ-like living, and we don’t see them materializing in our lives, it is easy to be discouraged. Perhaps you don’t want to hear this coming from a person who teaches the Bible, but I don’t have a lot of answers for all the suffering. This is why I always force myself to return to the cross. I see the Godliest man ever live a perfect life and observe what happened to Him. Living Christ-like comes with a cost – that’s one of the lessons of the cross. It’s hard, and it’s painful. However, we find a new level of the knowledge of God in our sufferings. Philippians 3:10 says, “*that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,*”

A Godly or Christ-like lead life will have its share of sufferings, and as hard as it may be, learning to embrace them is the best step of faith we can take. If God is truly in control, and He is, then nothing can get to you without God’s permission. Since He is good and love, then all of his thoughts towards you are from a good and loving place. It may not feel like that right now for some of you, but that doesn’t make it any less true. Living a Godly or Christ-like life is a worthy way to live – it changes us, and it will change the hearts of those around us. Whatever sufferings we’re experiencing today as a result of this choice of lifestyle, we can hold onto that great promise in Romans 8:18, “*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*”

Hebrews 13:15 confirms that sacrifice is a key component of Godly living, “*Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.*” Let us, as a group, stand together and give a sacrifice of praise to our God.

Praise God from Whom all blessings flow.
 Praise Him all creatures here below.
 Praise Him above the heavenly hosts.
 Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Let’s pray.