How Do I Grow in Godliness as a Christian?

(Christian Character Series Part VII)

2 Peter 1:6–7: *6 and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, 7 and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.*

The blueprint for Christian character development given by the Apostle Peter in **2 Peter 1** focuses on a profound series of steps we need to take in order to be more Christlike. With this blueprint, Peter lays out for us a ladder of Christian character development. As we examine it, we find that each rung of this ladder is vital to our success in climbing up onto the next rung. In the last five parts of this series, we focused on one rung of this ladder at a time and worked on making the connections between our foundation and how each step makes us more like Jesus. Now comes the sixth step, and this one really begins to shape what our outward Christian character should look like.

2 Peter 1:5-6: *5 …in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, 6 and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness.*

recap recap of our previous Christian Character Series

Here are the first five rungs of Apostle Peter's "virtue" ladder of Christian character:

The first two rungs:
The Allegiance Attribute of Faith—the allegiance of our life's direction.
The Allegiance Attribute of Moral Excellence—the allegiance of our heart.

Our faith in God's power and plan is our foundation. Without a godly standard of moral excellence driven by that faith, everything else we can potentially build upon our faith will crumble!

The third and fourth rungs:
The Allegiance Attribute of Knowledge—the allegiance of our intellect.
The Allegiance Attribute of Self-Control—the allegiance of our passions.

Moral excellence, built on faith, keeps our knowledge from being tainted by the agendas and opinions of our world. Knowing God is true knowledge, and this knowledge forms the pivot point of Christian self-control should look like. Here we begin to build a genuine Christlike character.

The fifth rung:
The Allegiance Attribute of Perseverance—the allegiance of our energy.

Perseverance is the regular restating and reapplying of our discipleship decisions. It is the act of consciously staying the course and of faithfully bearing the weight of our assigned burdens.

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What's next? 2 Peter 1:6: *...and in your perseverance, godliness <2150>,*

Godliness: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #2150 *eusebeia*; piety; specially, the gospel scheme

Thayer's Greek Lexicon: 1) reverence, respect 2) piety towards God, godliness

The sixth rung:
The Allegiance Attribute of Godliness—the allegiance of our character.

The Strong's Exhaustive Concordance defines *godliness* as "piety." Piety makes us think of quiet devotion, personal holiness and a religious feeling, but it's more active and visible. It's not merely being "good" or being "religious." It's a whole life orientation toward God that produces visible fruit.

A practical way to think about piety:

- Reverence for God will reshape how you treat people.
- Devotion to God produces justice, mercy, patience and integrity.
- Worship becomes a lifestyle.

Why is godliness the NEXT quality after perseverance? Keep this question in mind.

We ask this question with each of the rungs and will answer as we go.

When honored and followed, the self-control and perseverance of a true disciple of Christ will combat our imperfect and sinful ways and will inevitably produce godliness if we put all those pieces in order.

Part of being godly is to have an accurate assessment of ourselves (to be humble) as we stand in God's grace and give Him the true allegiance of our very character. Godliness requires a life of reverence and devotional behavior as we seek God's will in our lives.

We can view godliness as a result of achieving the previous five attributes.

This is the second mention of godliness by Peter in this teaching. Peter started this chapter highlighting its importance:
2 Peter 1:3: (KJV) *According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness <2150>, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue <703>* (Greek: *aretē*, moral excellence).

God has given us everything needed for life, and instruction on how we are to live life with godliness. That godliness—reverence or devotional behavior—has to be 24 hours a day.

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It is not putting on our "piety suit" to go to church. It is life-changing. It is how we live our lives in reverence to God.

Godliness: true character allegiance to God

- must be attained as a counterpart to the life opportunity that God gives us through His divine power.
- does not come easily to us—no one is naturally godly; we need to strive for it.
- is an integral part of our character building process.
- is to be prioritized above any earthly ambitions.

How do we develop godliness? By moving away from worldly things:
1 Timothy 4:6–8: *6 In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following. 7 But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness <2150>; 8 for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness <2150> is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.*

Godliness: true character allegiance to God

- is seeing things from God's standpoint—through the eyes of eternity and the ultimate well-being of all His creation.

God's word shows us His plan of salvation, that His kingdom will be here on earth as it is in heaven, and He will have all to be saved. This understanding helps shape our godly character.

- is to be *constantly nourished on the words of the faith and the words of sound doctrine which you have been following.*

The ladder virtues of self-control and perseverance have godliness as their target.

- is the reverential, devotional seeking of God's will on a daily basis.

Developing and maintaining godliness leads to even deeper growth.

Godliness, true character allegiance to God, can SEEM to be present in some people, but in reality, it is not:
2 Timothy 3:1–5: *1 But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. 2 For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, 4 treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,*

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We're living *in the last days*. This is talking about our day here and now. Of course, we recognize these traits are unfortunately all over the world, but we will see who Paul (writing to Timothy) is referring to with this horrific list—the so-called "people of faith," not humanity in general.

5 holding to a form (appearance) of godliness <2150>, although they have denied its power; avoid such men as these.

In the last days, watch out! There will be much false representation of what true godliness is. Those pretending godliness are putting on a façade, just a show. We have to be careful that the godliness we are seeking after is genuine, scriptural, humble, God-driven, Christlike godliness.

Remember, Satan can appear like an angel of light (**2 Corinthians 11:14**). Those with an appearance of godliness are Christians "in name only," counterfeits of Christ. We want nothing to do with the counterfeit; we want the genuine. These verses warn that godliness will be tested, especially in the last days.

Godliness, true character allegiance to God, is part of the highest standards of true Christianity:
1 Timothy 6:3–4: *3 If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness <2150>, 4 he is conceited and understands nothing;*

Godliness has to be built on the words of *our Lord Jesus Christ*, through doctrines that conform to what is godly, reverential and in accordance with God's will. How do we do this? By living our lives based only on God's word. Denominational traditions can be comforting but aren't necessarily based on God's word. True godliness comes only from living in God's word.

However, godliness can be outwardly and partially developed—and thereby misused to pursue earthly gain:
1 Timothy 6:4–5: *4 …but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, 5 and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness <2150> is a means of gain <4200>.*

This could apply to Christians accusing other Christians of misrepresenting Christ if they do not share the same beliefs—that action reflects evil intentions, control, power and hatred.

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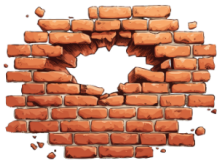
Gain: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #4200 *porismos*; from a derivative of *póros* (a way, i.e. means); furnishing (procuring), i.e. (by implication) money-getting (acquisition):—gain

Godliness is never a means of material gain! We look to Jesus, who never received money or riches from the gospel message. We look to the apostles and see the same. The mission we follow is higher than earthly standards and earthly objectives.

Such gain might look good, but it is only evil:
Proverbs 25:28: *Like a city that is broken into and without walls is a man who has no control over his spirit.*

A city without walls is exposed, vulnerable, easily invaded and unable to protect what's inside. **1 Timothy 6:4-5** is essentially describing what it looks like when the "walls" of a person's character have collapsed, ruled by impulses instead of God.



Without self-control, there is no structural integrity. Without structural integrity, godliness cannot stand. Godliness requires a heart that is ordered, guarded and ruled by God rather than by impulse.

It is no accident that the order given to us by Peter is self-control → perseverance → godliness. Godliness is the result of those things that are built on the knowledge of God, which is built on moral excellence, built on true faith. This is why godliness fits in this part of the equation—it is developed by applying all of the previous virtues.

In its appropriate application, our true character allegiance to God does bring great "gain." Let's define that great gain:
1 Timothy 6:6–10: *6 But godliness <2150> actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. 7 For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. 8 If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.*

The *great gain* is not acquiring "things"; it is being content. It is in saying, "God is with me in whatever my circumstance; therefore I am content." This is where godliness can flourish. It's not about *getting*; it's about being godly from the inside out.

9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

We can see the dramatic difference between the *great gain of godliness… accompanied by contentment* versus the *temptation* and *snare of foolish… desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction*!

Stepping away from our faith for a time to chase money seems harmless because we can always return later, right? But that's a dangerous lie. Many have followed that voice, wandered from the faith, and ended up with regret.

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The problem isn't money itself, but the way the desire for it can lure us away from what truly matters. Very few people can resist that pull, which is why the pursuit of riches becomes such a powerful trap.

Rick

This hits home with me. Early in my business career, maybe four or five years after we started Christian Questions on local radio, my senior director asked me to go on a business trip with him.

I was telling him about the exciting things we were doing with Christian Questions, and he said to me, "Look, Rick, you have a lot of talent. If you would be willing to back off from the radio program, just for two years of your time, I can work really hard with you and develop you. You'll be in such good shape, you'll be able to do that anywhere you want."

My answer to him was very clear. "I appreciate the offer, and I'm actually flattered by the fact that you think I have that talent, but you need to understand that those things I'm involved with on Christian Questions are what drive me to do everything else. If I take those things away, I am nothing. So, no, I can't do that."

I was a disappointment to him for the rest of the time I worked with him, but I'm not sad about that for a moment! No regrets, whatsoever.

How careful are we to regularly and thoroughly avoid such snares? They can sneak up on us!
Matthew 13:22: *And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.*

As part of the larger Parable of the Sower, Jesus here explains what crowds out our spiritual life—the cares of this world (status, security, identity) and the deceitfulness of riches (the illusion that wealth equals life). This describes someone for whom something other than the word of God has a stronger pull.

We can connect this to Jesus speaking to the rich young ruler in **Matthew 19:16-22**, who wanted to follow Jesus. He was incredibly wealthy, and Jesus advised him to sell what he had, give it to the poor and follow him. But the young man couldn't let go of the emotional hold his authority and riches held over him.

We need to be careful about such attachments. There is nothing wrong with dollars and cents. There is nothing wrong with having possessions. But do they hold us, or do we hold them for a specific purpose? How do they fit into our life's devotion to godliness?

Summing up Paul's admonition to Timothy to pursue the highest things with our whole being:
1 Timothy 6:11: *But flee from these things,* (Timothy) *you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness <2150>, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.*

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We added the name Timothy in the verse because Paul was writing to him, which makes it personal. What if we inserted our own name in the verse? For example: *But flee from these things*, Jonathan, *you man of God*! This is truly sobering.

To be defined as a *man of God*—that is godliness! There's the definition! Can we be defined as men or women of God? Is that what we look like? Is that what comes from inside of us as a witness to those around us?

Timothy was a leader in the early church, and Paul's admonitions of godliness for him belong to us as well. If we couldn't honestly be called a *man of God* or only fit that description part of the time, what do we have to undo? Or redo? What do we have to reapply to get our godliness—our reverence, devotion and continual seeking of God's will—in order?

Think of how the power of these next texts increases when our perseverance develops godliness:

Ephesians 3:16–19: *16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His spirit in the inner man, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.*

This is a perfect description of what godliness looks like. This isn't describing individuals who first learn of Jesus and have only an emotional attachment to claiming him as their Savior. While that's a good place to start, these scriptures describe a more mature Christlike character development rooted in genuine internal godliness**.**

The growth must come from the inside out, not from an external checklist. Many Christians have been taught to think they are all set if they just do "this, this and this," almost like checking off the boxes makes you a good Christian. But being Christlike is less about what we are doing and more about who we are and how we are growing. Our actions should reflect our internal growth.

Being only superficially or emotionally attracted to loving God and loving Jesus is like reading a book and getting excited about the description on the book jacket. It's exciting and we read it over and over, but until we get into the content, we won't see the depth. We won't experience the development. The actual content is what will drive us from the inside out. From the Bible we learn reverence, devotion and seeking God's will in all aspects of our lives—the inside of the book teaches godliness.

If godliness is our true character allegiance to God, then complete transformation is in order:

Romans 12:2–3: *2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. 3 For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think*

more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.

How can we be *transformed* without being *conformed to this world*? Does this happen just because we decide it should be done? No. It only happens *by the renewing of your mind.* How is our mind renewed? We have to reset our focus on our faith in God's power and plan; we have to keep that moral excellence (our compass), which guides our knowledge (keeping it based on truth); using self-control with perseverance to achieve the objective of godliness.

We have to put ourselves in a position where we are daily living the part, transforming as we go. The transformation doesn't happen overnight. It has to happen over time and with effort—falling down and getting up, falling down and getting up again and again.

We can't determine or prove God's will unless we are in reverent harmony with it. This is "inside out" godliness! This reverence comes from the heart, rather than fulfilling an external responsibility. We don't just check off the boxes. We need to put our heart into godliness and be genuine.

If we aren't certain of our authenticity, we need to bring it to the Father in prayer. "Lord, show me if I'm not being genuine. Show me how to be more genuine so that I can serve and honor You." Faking it doesn't honor God. We might look good to somebody else, but we are not honoring God. Godliness, by definition, is living in harmony with God's will and God's way. That is how we honor Him.

Finally, Peter brings godliness up again as a clear and powerful conclusion to these attributes of loyalty:
2 Peter 3:10–11*: 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.*

Let's take a moment to consider what Peter is saying: the current world and its order will eventually be removed. We know the collapse of Satan's present evil world will come to an end, and God's kingdom of love and peace will ultimately fill the earth.

11 Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness <2150>.

Since these prophecies are going to happen (we can even see them beginning to unfold), Peter asks the question, *what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct?* Will you be holy, sanctified, set-apart in conduct and godliness? Will you seek to have reverence, devotion and God's will in your life so when things start to collapse around you, you can maintain that high level of humility and focus on God?

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So, why is godliness the NEXT quality that follows perseverance?

Self-control needs perseverance to be effective. Self-control is great, but without perseverance, it falls flat on its face. Perseverance is MOST effective when there is a CLEARLY-DEFINED OBJECTIVE. Godliness, true character allegiance to God, is that clearly-defined objective. Without a clearly defined objective, our perseverance has no purpose. Godliness follows perseverance as the character attribute that honors God always in all circumstances.

Godliness is not something we only develop on the inside. It has to show. It is a part of who we are, and we can't be hiding it:
Matthew 5:16: *Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*

Is this saying that men, seeing our good works, will pat us on the back for such a good job? No, not even remotely close. It's not about us. This verse is about serving God and having others, seeing us, say, "He/she is a God-honoring individual, and I respect that." What better compliment could we receive? Of course, it would still be a compliment if they said, "He/she is a God-honoring individual, and I think they are full of baloney!" Both are compliments.

We also want to honor God with our godliness, and our reverent devotion, seeking God's will in all we think, say and do.

The Allegiance Attribute of Godliness: *Godliness is the payoff of perseverance. When we are godly, the fight against our old selves, the world and the devil becomes quickly discernable and quickly remedied, for our very character is now always seeking God. True character allegiance to God is a foundational step in actually living as a true disciple of Jesus.*

The whole point of this series is to find out how we can become authentic disciples of Jesus. How do we follow him?

The rungs of the ladder the Apostle Peter gave us lead us to the way to do this:
2 Peter 1:6–7: *6 and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, 7 and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.*

Godliness, that reverent devotion that seeks God's will every day, is how we develop godliness.

So, how do I grow in godliness as a Christian?
For Rick, Jonathan, Julie and Christian Questions...
...Think about it!

All scriptures cited are from the NASB1995 translation unless otherwise noted.

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Next episode

Episode 1426: What Does Brotherly Kindness Mean for a Christian? (Christian Character Series Part VIII)

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Bonus Material and Study Questions

Recommended additional study:

Ep. 1281: We Are What We Think About, So What Are We Thinking About? (Part I)
Unlocking the process of refocusing our thoughts towards godliness.
https://christianquestions.com/character/1281-christian-thinking-i/

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- **What is reverence?**
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Ep. 1425: How Do I Grow in Godliness as a Christian?
(Christian Character Series – Part VII)
https://christianquestions.com/character/1425-godliness-part-vii/

See: CQ Rewind SHOW NOTES

God has granted everything needed for life and godliness through His promises. These promises form the foundation of Christian character. Our response is allegiance—loyal commitment to God's will. 2 Peter 1:5-7 is used throughout the questions.

<u>Overarching Question</u>: Why does the Apostle Peter place godliness after perseverance, self-control, knowledge, moral excellence and faith in the "ladder" of Christian character development?

1. What does 2 Peter 1:3 tell us about how God's divine power equips us? What practical steps can we take to ensure we are living our lives in pursuit of godliness? What does 1 Timothy 4:6-8 tell us is needed to develop this godliness?

2. How can we discern between genuine godliness and the "appearance" of godliness?

3. What is the relationship between sound doctrine and godliness? (2 Timothy 3:1-5, 2 Corinthians 11:14, 1 Timothy 6:3-5)

4. In what way could godliness be misused to pursue earthly gain? What is the "great gain" the Christian receives in godly living? (1 Timothy 6:4-10, Proverbs 25:28)

5. Why does "the worry of the world and deceitfulness of wealth" pose a danger to our spiritual growth and godliness? (Matthew 13:22, 1 Timothy 6:11)

6. Do you think others look at you as a man/woman of God? Do you think you are? What do you need to undo? Or redo?

7. In what way is being "rooted and grounded in love" connected to the development of godliness? (Ephesians 3:16-19)

8. What practical actions can you take to "renew your mind" to avoid being conformed to the world? What is needed to achieve godliness "from the inside out"? (Romans 12:2-3)

9. What does Peter's question in 2 Peter 3:11 ("…what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness…?") demand of us in light of the coming transformation of the world? How can you maintain humility and focus on God during times of upheaval?

10. We must grow godliness from the inside out to be authentic. Does Matthew 5:16 disagree with that? Why is it that our good works can bring either respect or condemnation? Should either reaction be a concern or an affirmation?

11. How can you be more authentic in godliness?