

## **Introduction**

When I was a little boy, I had a pair of pants, a shirt, and shoes that I wore only to church on Sunday. As this power point slide shows, there wasn't anything unusual about that. It was the social convention of the day among Christians. They put public worship in **"Sunday go to meeting clothes"** as we called them then. And some of us still do.

But what we do with public worship we shouldn't do with godliness and I'm speaking metaphorically of course. We shouldn't put godliness in **"Sunday go to meeting clothes."** We should put it in everyday clothes instead and that's what I'm going to preach about today – godliness in everyday clothes.

## **Godliness in Everyday Clothes**

Earlier in the service, we read from the Book of Proverbs, which has a specific historical context. Around 770 B.C., several groupings of proverbs written by different wise men were brought together to form a manual. The purpose of that manual was to train adolescent Jewish males in the art of prudent and, thus, successful living – both in the king's court specifically and in all of life generally.

Its contents reflect that purpose. Let me paraphrase each of the 10 verses we read from it and you'll grasp what I mean. **3:27** - Pay your bills on time. **6:9** - Don't sleep too much. **10:19** - Don't talk too much. **12:10** - Be kind to animals. **15:17** - Eat your meals in peace. **18:13** – Don't jump to conclusions. **26:17** – Mind your own business. **25:24** – Don't marry a high maintenance woman. **26:11** – Don't repeat mistakes. And **27:14** – Don't abuse the goodwill of your friends.

The Book of Proverbs is obviously different in content than the other books of the Bible. It addresses small details of character and behavior that are beyond their scope. Religion, as a result, is implicit not explicit in most of its verses. I enjoy the way Bible commentator Derek Kidner

explains it, “**(It’s) a book which seldom takes you to church.**” He’s right about that. It seldom takes us to church. It takes us to the office, the factory, the classroom, the ball field, the department store, the barn, and the kitchen instead. It seldom mentions preaching, witnessing, worshipping, praying, or reading the Bible. It mentions talking too much, paying our bills, being bearable in the morning, wearing out our welcome, being prompt, slacking, and eating too much instead.

That kind of content reveals what the Book of Proverbs does. It puts godliness in everyday clothes. When I say “**godliness,**” I mean casting our allegiance for God - honoring Him by thinking, feeling, and acting consistently with His desires and concerns. When I say “**put in everyday clothes,**” I mean be godly in all the activities and contexts of our lives. No activity or context is so mundane or small that we don’t cast our allegiance for God in it.

There’s no doubt about it. The Book of Proverbs puts godliness in everyday clothes – and so should we. That’s its call to us and we answer it by doing three things, each of which I’d like to explain.

### **View Godliness as All-Encompassing**

First, we view godliness as all encompassing.

Think of this in terms of what is sacred and what is secular. Sacred means something lies within the sphere of God’s desires and concerns. Secular means something lies outside that sphere. In that regard, many professing Christians see a dichotomy between what is sacred and what is secular. Select activities and contexts lie within the sphere of God’s desires and concerns. All the rest lie outside that sphere.

The Search Institute conducted a survey of thousands of Americans who were part of mainline denominations. It found that only 32% of those believe faith has anything to do with their lives outside the church. The implication is startling. It’s that 68% believe faith is relevant when they’re in church on Sunday. But it’s irrelevant when they’re out of it from Monday through Saturday.

That survey shows that most people in mainline denominations compartmentalize their lives. They identify select activities and contexts as sacred and all the rest as secular and separate the two. They attempt to be godly in the ones that are sacred but don't attempt to be in the ones that are secular. They take God's desires and concerns into account in church but not out of it. They take them into account when they're worshipping, praying, and reading the Bible but not when they're doing anything else.

Now, evangelicals like us don't compartmentalize our lives as comprehensively as mainliners do. Nonetheless, many of us do compartmentalize them to one extent or another. Select activities and contexts, for one reason or another, are secular to us. Because they are, we don't take God's desires and concerns into account at all in them.

When I was practicing law, I represented a Christian in a domestic relations case. I suggested to her in our first meeting that Jesus wanted her to prosecute the divorce with integrity and love. To which she replied, "**Don't preach to me. This is divorce court not church.**" Her reply revealed the dichotomy in her mind. We need to be godly in church activities because they're sacred. We don't need to be godly in legal activities because they're secular.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The Book of Proverbs teaches that godliness is all-encompassing and we need to view it that way. We need to recognize and believe this. Literally all the activities and contexts of our lives are sacred – that they all lie within the sphere of God's desires and concerns.

In 1536, the great English reformer, William Tyndale, was convicted of heresy and executed. One of the charges against him at his heresy trial was a statement he had made and firmly believed: "**If we look externally, there is a difference betwixt the washing of dishes and preaching the word of God; but as touching to please God, in relation to His call, none at all.**" Tyndale believed, in other words, that washing dishes is as sacred an activity as preaching is.

He was right. When it comes to pleasing God, there's no difference betwixt washing dishes, driving a car, watching television, and eating on the one hand and worshipping, praying, and reading the Bible on the other. Godliness is all-encompassing and we need to view it that way.

### **Define Godliness in Detail**

We put godliness into everyday clothes by doing a second thing. We define godliness particularly, in detail. We determine what God's specific desires and concerns are in the activities and contexts of our lives.

I've discovered over the years that there are basically two kinds of ungodliness among professing Christians. One is intentional. They're aware that God has desires and concerns in select activities and contexts but don't take them into account. The other is unintentional. They aren't aware that God has desires and concerns in select activities and contexts and don't take them into account.

There's an old child's prayer that goes like this, "**Lord, make the bad people good, and the good people nice.**" Consider that for a few moments because it's truly insightful. It implies that there are good people who aren't nice.

I know a person from another church who is essentially good as most would define it. She's a long-established Christian who is hard working, generous, and sincere. But she routinely does something "**not nice.**" Instead of taking an eager interest in what someone is saying, she almost always turns the conversation to her. No matter what a person says or talks about, she almost always has personal stories she tells about it. She's far more concerned about getting her "**two cents in**" than she is about listening. It's annoying and makes people uncomfortable with her.

That old child's prayer and the dominating conversationalist who illustrates it reveal this insight and again I quote Derek Kidner, "**There are details of character small enough to escape the mesh of the law and the broadside of the prophets, and yet decisive in personal dealings.**" That's a profound observation. *For the most part*, the law

and the prophets in the Old Testament and the gospels and the letters in the New Testament major in the broader principles of godliness. *For the most part*, the Book of Proverbs majors in its details.

And therein lies the problem for many Christians. They grasp the principles of godliness but miss its details. Going back to the dominating conversationalist, she knows the principle – love your neighbor as yourself. But she either doesn't know or ignores the detail – love doesn't dominate conversations. And so she isn't godly, nice, in that regard.

The moral is that you and I must define godliness particularly. We must know not just its principles but its details as well.

We define it particularly by doing two things.

First, we study the Bible and identify the details of godliness it reveals. We begin with Proverbs, which majors in those details. We also study the other books, which minor in them. I know this detail, for instance, from Proverbs 18:17. It's godly to hear both sides before making judgments about people. Or I know from 1 Timothy 2:9 that it's ungodly to dress ostentatiously, in a way that draws attention to me.

We define godliness particularly by doing a second thing. We infer details from the principles and details of godliness the Bible reveals. Colossians 3:23, for instance, teaches that godliness does its work **"heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men."** I've inferred a host of details from that principle including this one. We must give 100% effort 100% of the time in our jobs no matter how little we're paid.

That then is the second thing we do to put godliness in everyday clothes. We define it particularly, in detail.

### **Live Out the Details of Godliness**

There's a third thing we do. We live out the details of godliness.

Doing that is a two-step process. First, we bring those details to mind in the activities or contexts before us. Second, we do our best to act consistently with them.

If we're disciples of Jesus, we can live out 80% or more of the

details by trying. So, I hear both sides before making judgments about people by trying to. We can live out the other 20% by training. We train by practicing appropriate spiritual disciplines of abstinence and engagement. The Holy Spirit slowly but surely transforms us as we do so. We can then live out what we've trained to do by trying. So, I bless those who spit in my face by training to.

Simply put, we try and train, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to live out the details of godliness in all the activities and contexts of our lives.

Take business as an example of what I mean. In 17<sup>th</sup> century England, dickering was the accepted practice for selling and buying, with retailers and their customers each seeking to get the upper hand. But Quaker retailers refused to dicker. They invented fixed pricing instead so that customers would always get good products at a fair prices. They were following the teaching of the first Quaker, George Fox, in doing so. One of Fox's primary concerns was what he called "**everyday righteousness.**" And he often focused on business practices in that regard. He wrote about that: "**Wrong no man, overreach no man but be plain, righteous, and holy. In this are ye serviceable to your own nation and others by your change and exchanging of things and merchandize. And to the Lord God ye come to be a blessing in the creation and generation.**" Quakers, in other words, put godliness in business clothes. They brought the details of godliness to mind in every transaction with every customer and tried their best to act consistently with them.

## **Conclusion**

So should we. Whether it's washing dishes, casting a vote, leaving a tip, disciplining a child, charging a fee, studying for a test, or dating to name a few, let's cast our allegiance for and not against God. Let's put our godliness in everyday clothes.