

Week 1: Worldliness vs. Godliness

“You and I have need of the strongest spell that can be found to wake us from the evil enchantment of worldliness.” (C.S. Lewis)

Few distinctions are more clearly delineated in Scripture than the one between worldliness and godliness. In no uncertain terms, Scripture indicates that the character promoted by the world is diametrically opposed to the character promoted by God.

This does not stop us from blurring the lines, though.

As Christians, we often swallow, with ravenous enthusiasm, the poisonous lie promulgated by Satan himself that we can have our cake and eat it, too. We delude ourselves into thinking that piety and frivolity are symbiotic.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Godliness and worldliness are not parallel paths; they are wholly divergent. And so we stand at a crossroads. Every time we make a decision.

Either we will take the path that leads to life and godliness. Or we'll take the path that leads to death and worldliness. (cf. Deut. 30: 15-20; Joshua 24: 15)

There is no middle ground. Only life or death. Only hot or cold.

God will vomit out of His mouth those who are lukewarm. (Revelation 3:16)

At The Heart of the Distinction

When you boil it all down, there is one defining feature that distinguishes the worldly character from the godly one:

Motive.

Worldliness, at its core, is selfish. Godliness, on the other hand, at its core, is selfless. One looks inward. The other looks outward.

One says, “my will be done.” The other says, “Your will be done.”

3 Biblical Analogies

Scripture uses multiple analogies to describe the drastic nature of the distinction between godliness and worldliness. Consider three of them:

Light vs. Darkness

Possibly the most vivid analogy Scripture uses to describe the distinction between godliness and worldliness is that of light and darkness.

John describes Christ as the “true Light” (John 1:9), and Jesus later confirms this epithet as valid when He simply states, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12).

It’s important to note that Christ did not say that He has the light of the world; He says that He is the light of the world. Thus, light is a defining feature of Christ Himself, not just His message. (And as Christ is one with God, it’s not surprising that John later writes of God the Father, “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5, NKJV).)

As a result, it only makes sense then that those who call themselves by Christ's name should also be described as the "light of the world" (Matthew 5:14) and as "having the light of life" (John 8:12).

Because God defines Himself as light, and bestows this light upon all who faithfully follow Him, everything that stands in opposition to Him must necessarily be described as darkness:

- 1 John 1:6 draws a distinction between fellowship with God and "walking in darkness."
- Christ indicates that those who follow Him "shall not walk in darkness" (John 8:12, NKJV).
- Paul indicates that we should, "Walk as children of light...and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness" (Ephesians 5:8-13, NKJV).
- Paul also writes that the godly have been "...delivered...from the power of darkness..." (Colossians 1:13, NKJV).
- To the Christians in Thessalonica, Paul writes, "You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness" (1 Thessalonians 5:5, NKJV).
- Peter writes that the godly "...were called...out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

In the end, godliness and worldliness are as different as day and night.

Truth vs. The Lie

A second analogy that Scripture uses to illustrate the distinction between godliness and worldliness is that of truth and a lie.

Just like Christ defines Himself by light, He also defines Himself by truth: “I am the way, the truth, and the life...” (John 14:6, NKJV) Similarly, Jesus prays to the Father that He would, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:17, NKJV). Again, it isn’t that God’s word has truth, it’s that God’s word is truth.

Accordingly, those who align themselves with the Creator are described as “walking in truth” (2 John 4; 3 John 3-4) and as “obeying the truth” (Galatians 5:7).

Because God is truth, everything that stands against Him is described as the opposite of truth. Whereas Scripture indicates that it is impossible for God to lie (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18), it describes Satan as the “father of lies” (John 8:44).

Thus, those who choose an ungodly character are described as being “...of [their] father the devil...” (John 8:44) and as “wandering from the truth” (James 5:19, NKJV). When man opts for worldliness over godliness, he “...exchanges the truth of God for the lie...” (Romans 1:25).

So, just as godliness and worldliness are as different as night and day, they are also as different as truth and a lie.

Purity vs. Defilement

A third analogy that Scripture uses to highlight the distinction between godliness and worldliness is that of purity and defilement.

Purity is yet another defining feature of God Himself (1 John 3:3). As a result, everything that emanates from Him is also pure, including His words (Psalm 12:6; Psalm 119:140), His commandments (Psalm 19:8), and His wisdom (James 3:17).

Who then is qualified to associate with God? Those who have adopted a godly character and have purified their hearts (Psalm 24:4; cf. James 4:8 and 1 Peter 1:22). Jesus reiterates this when He says, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).

If the godly character is described as pure, then the worldly character is described as defiled:

- Jude describes certain apostates as having “...defiled the flesh...” (Jude 8).

- The Hebrew writer equates “falling short of the grace of God” with bitterness, trouble, and “becoming defiled” (Hebrews 12:15, NKJV).

- Paul, in his letter to Titus, makes a marked distinction between the “pure” and the “defiled”

(Titus 1:15).

- Jesus speaks of “...evil coming from within and defiling a man” (Mark 7:23, NKJV).

Thus, just as godliness and worldliness are as different as night and day and truth and a lie, they are also as different as purity and defilement.

The Bottom Line

If we are to be people of godly character, we cannot even so much as dabble in worldliness.

Godliness and worldliness are not opposite sides of the same coin...they are in fact two entirely distinct monetary systems. What works in the kingdom of this world is not even recognized by God as valid currency in His kingdom.

“No man can serve two masters,” Jesus said (Matthew 6:24, NKJV). It’s not that doing so is a bad idea, it’s that doing so is impossible.

Because we cannot be both godly and worldly, we must make a choice. No single human decision has any more gravity than this, as what we select will do no less than determine our eternal destiny.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Cursed are the defiled in heart, for they shall not see God.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Can you think of any other analogies/descriptions that Scripture uses to distinguish between godliness and worldliness?
2. Christ describes His followers as “the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13). List some qualities of salt that might be applicable to Christians. If the godly are the salt, what are the worldly?
3. Is it possible to be an undercover/camouflaged Christian? In other words, is it possible to have a godly character and go unnoticed in a worldly environment? What does Christ teach regarding the world’s response to a godly character? What does He teach about our willingness/hesitancy to demonstrate a godly character in a worldly environment?