

VIRTUE I

GODLINESS

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

—Ephesians 5:1-2

Being godly means imitating God in your daily life. Put simply, a godly person is one who responds to daily life activities and circumstances in the way that Christ would. Essentially, this means aspiring to godly virtues (such as those defined in this book) while avoiding sin. First Timothy 6:11 encourages us to “Flee from all this (sin), and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.” These two actions—fleeing sin and pursuing righteousness—are the two “action commands” of godliness that can be used guide your decisions in daily life situations.

But wait a minute . . . knights were warriors—how can a person be a warrior and godly at the same time? Even a quick tour through the Gospels shows that Christ had many warrior-like traits (although not in a violent sense). Christ stood up to wrongdoing and wrongdoers (John 8:1-11). He used physical force when appropriate (Mark 11:15-19) yet opposed violence (Matthew 18:11).

Even God Himself is often characterized as a strong, kind, gentle, all-powerful warrior:

Out of the brightness of his presence clouds advanced, with hailstones and bolts of lightning. The Lord thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded. He shot his arrows and scattered the enemies, great bolts of lightning and routed them. The valleys of the sea were exposed and the foundations of the earth laid bare at your rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of breath from your nostrils (Psalm 18:12-15).

So there we have it—the very creator of life, God Himself, is displayed in Scripture as a warrior slinging hailstones, bolts of lightning, and arrows and capable of laying out the foundations of the earth by a massive blast from his nostrils.

In Isaiah 42:13 God “marches out like a mighty man, like a warrior he will stir up his zeal; with a shout he will raise the battle cry and will triumph over his enemies.” In Exodus 15:3, the Lord “is a warrior, the Lord is his name.” There should not be any doubt that God is—and was—the mightiest warrior of all time.

A famous medieval writer, Cistercian Abbot Bernard of Clairvaux, wrote a treatise to help inspire the (relatively new) Knights Templar Order in the early twelfth century. In describing the “ideal Christian knight,” he wrote:

These are Godly men who shun every excess in clothing and food. They live as brothers in joyful and sober company (with) one heart and one soul . . . There is no distinction of persons among them and deference is shown to merit rather than to noble blood. They rival one another in mutual consideration, and they carry one another’s burdens, thus fulfilling the law of Christ.¹²

Bernard further described the virtues of this true Christian knight as, “humility, austerity, justice, obedience, unselfishness, and a single-minded zeal for Jesus Christ in defending the poor, the weak, the Church and persecuted Christians.”

REFLECT

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk, or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

—Ephesians 5:3-5

Avoid every kind of evil. May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

—1 Thessalonians 5:22-24

RESPOND

1. How do the passages above encourage you to live a godly life?
2. What is godliness?
3. Where does it come from?
4. How do we maintain godliness, even when we sin and make mistakes?

5. What does a godly life look like?
6. What happens if we are not godly?
7. Can you think of a person (dead or alive) who is godly?
How did they live that made their life godly? How did they
recover from the mistakes in their lives?