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*Journal of Biblical  
Pentecostalism  
Volume 3  
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Fall 2021-22*

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## Introduction to the Journal

The purpose of the Journal of Biblical Pentecostalism is to bless the church with pentecostal scholarship from the faculty of Bridges Christian College. One part of the journal is exegetical and the other part is more practical in nature. The rationale for such a broad scope is so that there will be literature for the biblical researcher and the ministerial practitioner.

### Mission of the Journal

The *Journal of Biblical Pentecostalism* presents biblical exegesis, ministerial training literature, and research of church history through a Pentecostal hermeneutic.

### Goals of the Journal

This Journal has the following goals.

1. To present exegesis of the Scriptures with a Pentecostal hermeneutic to help the church understand the Bible and its theological principles.
2. To demonstrate the unity of the Scriptures through intertextual interpretation of the Old Testament and New Testament.
3. To apply Scriptural principles to a Pentecostal, practical ministry environment.
4. To present research of the roots and traditions of the Pentecostal movement throughout church history.

### Journal Categories

This Journal will present articles that are separated into the following categories:

1. Biblical Studies
  - This category presents interpretation of the biblical text with a Pentecostal perspective. Various themes and theological principles in the Old and New Testaments will be presented.
  - This section is primarily focused on research on the biblical text.
2. Spirit-Empowered Ministry
  - This category presents articles that provide guidance in modern-day, Pentecostal ministry topics.
  - The biblical text, historical concerns, and Pentecostal doctrines are taken into consideration. The emphasis in this section is on application of the biblical principles to Pentecostal ministry.

## JOB'S RELEVANCE FOR THE MODERN BELIEVER

Richard Miller, Ph.D.

When people think of the Book of Job, many believers focus on the encounter between God and Satan. This encounter details the challenge God entertained from Satan. The context provides numerous issues regarding the setting and who the “Sons of God” represent in this pericope.<sup>1</sup> The term “Satan” (שָׂטָן) provides an additional challenge. The Hebrew word translated as “Satan” has its roots in the Persian Aramaic of the Exilic Period. Translators used "adversary" until the word appears in Job, 1 Chronicles, and Zechariah. 1 Chronicles and Zechariah originated in the Post Exilic period. Many consider the Job text a much older text (especially poetry sections), but some consider the narrative sections (Chapter 1-2 and 42-7-17) to be a later addition to the book. This theory seems to fit the tone and nature of the content. The purpose of this article considers the theological significance of the poetry section and its relationship to the modern reader. In particular, the theological issue of why righteous people suffer. This theological dilemma has some of its roots in the previous article in the Winter Issue 2020 of Journal of Biblical Pentecostalism, “The Theological Development of Death and the Afterlife” by Richard Miller, Ph.D. If a righteous person suffers during this life, how can God's blessings be negated? If God's promise of blessings fails to materialize because of the wicked, natural disasters, or other forces, how can God's promises of blessings be realized? As the previous article suggests, the final solution lies in the reward of blessings in the afterlife. This solution provides no comfort during life crises. Loss of health, unexpected death of a family member, loss of material possessions from natural disasters create cognitive dissonance.<sup>2</sup> for the righteous who rely upon God's promises of blessings. Job's theological understanding mimics the blessings and cursings of Deuteronomy 27-29. This theological understanding is also known as Retributive Theology.

In Israelite theology, God is just, and he administers justice in the world. He employs the retribution principle to give insight into his character and articulate his administration's general parameters. This activity can be traced on both a corporate and an individual level. The unique shape of the retribution principle within Israelite thought is heavily influenced by two philosophical preconceptions: the existence of only one God and the absence of a belief in reward and punishment in the afterlife.<sup>3</sup>

Understanding retributive theology provides the key to understand Job and his friends' theological discussions. When Job's friends interacted with him, they applied Job's theological teaching that he has espoused. Eliphaz's opening statement to Job clearly announces Job's theological teachings.

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<sup>1</sup> “Pericope” refers to a contained unit of literature. Other terms would be story or discourse.

<sup>2</sup> Cognitive dissonance is "psychological conflict resulting from incongruous beliefs and attitudes held simultaneously" (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cognitive%20dissonance>, accessed on October 5, 2021, i.e., blessings for wicked and curses for the righteous versus blessings for the righteous and curses for the wicked).

<sup>3</sup> J. H. Walton and T. Longman, III, *How to Read Job* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2015), 97.

NAS Job 4:3-7 “Behold you have **admonished** (יִפְרֹתָ) many, And you have strengthened weak hands. Your words have helped the tottering to stand, And you have strengthened feeble knees. But now it has come to you, and you are impatient; It touches you, and you are dismayed. Is not your fear of God your confidence, And the integrity of your ways your hope? Remember now, whoever perished being innocent? Or where were the upright destroyed?”

In Job 4:3 Eliphaz’s discourse begins with the Hebrew verb (יִפְרֹתָ). The verb form is piel perfect second person singular. The Piel verb form indicates emphatic usage. Job emphatically admonished those around him. People despise preachers who don't practice what they preach—especially those in authority, i.e., politicians who don't practice what they demand of others. Job's friends had every right to criticize Job. Job's refusal to judge his situation by his own theological standards infuriated his friends. Job knew that he had not violated the Torah; therefore, his judgment from God constituted a violation of retributive theology principles. Job’s crisis resulted in the ultimate cognitive dissonance. Job’s theological worldview had collapsed, and his friends added fuel to Job's theological crisis.

What lessons can the modern believer retrieve from the Book of Job, and how should believers deal with personal crises or counseling those in crisis. Pastors and Christian counselors deal with this issue regularly. What do you say to a mother who just lost a child to cancer? As a Pentecostal and faith healing believer whose faith resides in the God who created life, I know He can and does heal people. But what do believers do when the healing does not arrive to save their loved ones. Recently, a family close to me lost a loved one to cancer. Their daughter was only 27 and full of life and served God with music and worship. As Job experienced in Job 1-3:

NAS Job 1:18-20 While he was still speaking, another also came and said, “Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house, and behold, a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people and they died; and I alone have escaped to tell you.” Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped.

NAS Job 3:25 “For what I fear comes upon me, And what I dread befalls me.”

As a father and grandfather, I truly understand Job’s total despair. The loss of a child would inflict unimaginable pain and spiritual hardship. The cold and harsh words “WHY GOD” do not provide comfort, but anger. Job's personal health crisis extended his mental and spiritual dissonance, and with the added criticism from his wife and friends, his situation would be overwhelming.

Great tension exists between the theological issues of good and evil. If God is good, then why does he allow terrible things to happen to good people who serve Him faithfully. “The role of the book of Job is to perform the radical surgery that separates theology from theodicy, contending that in the end Yahweh’s justice must be taken on faith rather than worked out

philosophically.”<sup>4</sup> A great chasm separates human experience and theological principles of retributive theology. I prefer the expression of "Blessings and Cursings Theology" to describe retributive theology. People can relate to the idea that if one does good, God will bless. If one sins, God will curse. This simplistic approach has its roots in Deuteronomy 27:11-28:68. Moses commanded the tribes of Israel to recite the covenant of Cursings and Blessings on Mt. Gerizim and Mt Ebal. Since disobedience results in curses, the logical conclusion suggests that a person experiencing terrible things must have sinned and violated God's law. This type of conclusion provided the backdrop for Job's friends to assault his integrity.

A conversation shared with me in 2004 about God's wrath and hurricanes supplies insights into how people apply Blessings and Cursing Theology. A group of Christians were discussing how the people of Florida must be really sinning a lot after four powerful hurricanes impacted Florida in the 2004 hurricane season. Yet, when hurricane Katrina devastated their communities in 2005, the same standard did not apply to their situation. Others made theological pronouncements about the evils of New Orleans and Bourbon Street and God's punishment via Katrina. However, Bourbon Street did not flood, but the floodwaters did destroy hundreds of churches. Theological opinions such as these prove to be counterproductive and suggest that God's wrath is misplaced. I have heard others make statements such as: If you have faith, God must and will heal you. When I hear these types of theological pronouncements, I recall Acts 3:1-8, where Peter and John prayed for the lame man at the Gate Beautiful. What faith did the lame man possess that provided him with his divine healing? The pericope clearly relied on Peter and John's faith.

A look at 1 Chronicles 28:9 “As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever,” illustrates the retributive nature of God towards humanity when a person fails to fulfill God's covenant. Many Christian see Solomon as a great king of Israel; however, this position of reverence fails to consider his absolute failures.

NAS 1 Kings 11:1-10 Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the sons of Israel, “You shall not associate with them, neither shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods.” Solomon held fast to these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away. For it came about when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians and after Milcom the detestable idol of the Ammonites. And Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not follow the LORD fully, as David his father had done. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable idol of Moab, on the mountain which is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the detestable idol of the sons of Ammon. Thus also he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods. Now the LORD was angry with Solomon

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 95.



because his heart was turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not observe what the LORD had commanded.

How can God bless a leader who caused such havoc on the nation of Israel's religious system? The historical books blame Jeroboam the son of Nebat twenty-one times (1 Kgs 14:16; 15:30, 34; 16:2, 19, 26; 22:52; 2 Kgs 3:3; 10:29, 31; 13:2, 6, 11; 14:24; 15:9, 18, 24, 28; 17:21, 22; 23:15) for Israel's sins. Yet, Solomon, who did far more egregious violations of the Covenant, shares no such condemnation. Solomon resided over Israel's golden age of prosperity (Blessings); yet, failed to follow the criteria of 1 Chronicles 28:9. Perhaps the Deuteronomistic Historian(s) did not wish to tarnish one of their iconic king's and expose his failures. Moreover, did God excuse Solomon's behavior because of Nathan's prophetic pronouncement to David. These issues have no theological solution. Solomon should have lost his kingdom because of his actions of disobedience, but he did not.

Several examples of the Chronicler's historiography illustrate the function of retribution as a standard. The Chronicler's evaluation of Asa as a king who did that which was good and right in Yahweh's eyes is taken with only slight alteration from 1 Kgs 15:11, and both accounts relate his reforming zeal in some detail. For the Chronicler, such loyalty is rewarded with a ten-year period of rest (2 Chr 13:23 [14:1]), as well as by other signs of prosperity (2 Chr 14:5–7 [6–8]). An invasion by Zerah the Ethiopian with no less than a million soldiers is easily repelled during this period by a force of only half that size since Asa demonstrated the necessary faith in Yahweh (2 Chr 14:8–14 [9–15]).<sup>5</sup>

The Hebrew Scriptures contain a plethora of examples that demonstrate the theological construct of Blessing and Cursings Theology. This volume of examples cannot be overlooked as one attempts to understand its connection to the modern believer.

In contrast to this Israelite theology, the biblical theology of the wisdom literature is more cautious and nuanced. The text never affirms the converse corollary (i.e., those who prosper are righteous and those who suffer are wicked), so it cannot be framed as a biblical teaching. Furthermore, Proverbs couches the retribution principle in proverbial language, Ecclesiastes casts suspicion on it, and the book of Job details its limitations. Thus, biblical theology rejects the retribution principle as providing a theodicy yet embraces it in its theology.<sup>6</sup>

The apparent theological conflicts of God's role in Blessings and Cursings extend into the New Testament.

John 9:1-3 And as He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?"

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<sup>5</sup> David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, et al., "Editorial Preface," in *1 Chronicles*, vol. 14, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1986), xxxvii–xxxviii.

<sup>6</sup> J. H. Walton and T. Longman, III, 105.

Jesus answered, “It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was in order that the works of God might be displayed in him.”

One may appreciate this passage as vindication for the parents and the blind man; but consider the loss of this man’s quality of life for the 18 to 30 years prior to Jesus’s healing. Does it not seem cruel and unjust? This comment conveys a negative viewpoint about this historical event. But one must consider the reality and its impact on individual lives. When circumstances impact one’s personal life, determining blame provides no comfort.

When life situations become overwhelming, the desire to make sense of the tragedies enables people to cope. This can be seen with Job. When Job’s wife and friends pointed out Job’s theological worldview of blessings and cursings, Job faced a theological crisis. His theological worldview failed to match the reality of his situation. He denied any wrongdoing on his part; thus, God’s punishment must be in error. However, how can God be in error? Consider the following passages:

Job 19:6-10 “Know then that God has **wronged** (עָוָהְנִי) **me**, and has closed His net around me. Behold, I cry, ‘Violence!’ but I get no answer; I shout for help, but there is no justice. He has walled up my way so that I cannot pass; And He has put darkness on my paths. He has stripped my honor from me, And removed the crown from my head. He breaks me down on every side, and I am gone; And He has uprooted my hope like a tree.”

In this passage, the author used the verb עָוָה in the piel perfect third person masculine singular with first-person common suffix. Piel provides an emphatic emphasis. Job was not wronged; he was seriously wronged. Bildad used this word twice in Job 8:3 to defend God’s righteousness. Job 8:3 “Does God **pervert** justice? Or does the Almighty **pervert** what is right?” (Job 8:3 NAS) Elihu made a similar observation in Job 34:12: “Surely, God will not act wickedly, And the Almighty will not **pervert** justice” (Job 34:12 NAS). The author used the “piel” form in each of four occurrences. This usage demonstrates the intensity of their conversations. Each participant emphatically believed in his theological worldview.

Job 23:1-7 Then Job replied, “Even today my complaint is rebellion; His hand is heavy despite my groaning. Oh that I knew where I might find Him, That I might come to His seat! I would present my case before Him And fill my mouth with arguments. I would learn the words which He would answer, And perceive what He would say to me. Would He contend with me by the greatness of His power? No, surely He would pay attention to me. There the upright would reason with Him; And I would be delivered forever from my Judge.”

This passage provides great insight into Job’s anger and frustration. Job claimed that if God would allow him to meet and provide his defense, God would surely drop all punishments. Job’s frustration can be seen as an assault on God’s integrity. This assault on God’s wisdom and plan provides insights into a common problem for believers today. Many people develop guilty feelings for blaming God for their situation. They develop anger, and this brings about cognitive

dissonance. How can one love a God and be loved by a God who allows bad things to happen to His children? This conflict between good and evil has confounded humanity since the beginning of God's creation. Job's pericope highlights the universal complaint about terrible things happening to the righteous.

Habakkuk faced a similar crisis. The prophet lived in the pre-Babylonian invasions during and after the death of Josiah. The prophet Jeremiah and Habakkuk would have supported the reforms implemented by the king. They would have considered the reforms the will of God. They would have seen Josiah as God's righteous servant. If these factors are correct, why did God allow him to meet an untimely death at the hands of the Egyptians. 2 Kings 23 details the great lengths Josiah implemented to rid the nation of idol worship. Those who participated in the corrupt religious practices would not appreciate his efforts. After all, he was putting idol-worshipping priests out of business. When a government imposes its will on religious systems by banning religious practices, those affected will not be happy with the outcome - unemployment. The idol worshipers and priests would have objected to Josiah's reformation. After his death, they returned in force to retake their former places of worship and idolatrous practices. Their justification and vindication would have been the death of Josiah by the hand of the gods. Their argument would be that Josiah's reforms rebelled against the gods' will, and they allowed the Egyptians to remove him from office to allow the religious practices to return to normal. Their worldview of retributive theology justified the death of Josiah. This setting absolutely confounded the prophets of Jeremiah and Habakkuk. Why would God allow for Josiah's death when great progress had been achieved? Habakkuk's opening verses point out his frustration with God's inaction against the unrighteous. For Habakkuk, God's failure to punish the wicked led to a perversion of the LAW. If indeed the blessings and cursings theological worldview was true, how could the wicked reign supreme over God's righteous people? God's response to Habakkuk shook his worldview. God would use the wicked to accomplish His outcomes.

Hab 1:12-13 Art Thou not from everlasting, O LORD, my God, my Holy One? **We will not die.** Thou, O LORD, hast appointed them to judge; And Thou, O Rock, hast established them to correct. Thine eyes are too pure to approve evil, And Thou canst not look on wickedness with favor. Why dost Thou look with favor on those who deal treacherously? Why art Thou silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they? (**Hab. 1:12-13 NAS**)

Hab 1:12-13 LORD, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, **you will never die.** You, LORD, have appointed them to execute judgment; you, my Rock, have ordained them to punish. Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves? (**Hab. 1:12-13 NIV**)

The translations differ greatly; see the bold text above. The NAS translated נָמֹת *“We will not die.”* and the NIV translated the word, *“you will never die.”* The word *“die”* is a qal imperfect first common plural verb. Clearly, the word indicates that *“We”* provides the best literal translation.

Perhaps the NIV translation committee struggled with “we” and felt that “you” better reflected the context. But if one sees Habakkuk’s disbelief in God’s plan and Habakkuk inserting a rhetorical objection supported by his worldview concerning retributive theology, one can see why “we” fits the prophet’s words. Verse 13 clearly struggles with the idea that God could use evil to accomplish his plan. Habakkuk expresses utter disbelief and continues in denial until God responds in 2:2-4.

Hab. 2:2-4 Then the LORD answered me and said, “Record the vision and inscribe it on tablets, That the one who reads it may run. For the vision is yet for the appointed time; It hastens toward the goal, and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it; For it will certainly come, it will not delay. Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith.”

God made it clear to Habakkuk. Your disbelief will not stop the evil that He has ordained. Your worldview will fail to explain the transpiring events.

God’s plan made zero sense to Habakkuk. As with Job, God’s plan made zero sense. Hence, the dilemma for every believer, how does one react to God when terrible things happen to the righteous. Job did not react in a positive way. He claimed that God had wronged him. When evil befalls the righteous, one of a number of possibilities transpires 1. Anger, 2. Cognitive Dissonance, 3. Rejection of God, 4. Fatalistic Submission, 5. Blame, and/or 6. Depression. As ministers of the Gospel, this issue will be the most difficult situation from which to comfort and provide recovery. The challenge for the minister deals with the people blaming God or blaming themselves. The blame will originate from one’s worldview of blessings and cursings. If one takes Job's position, the blame is towards God. If they take Job's friends' view, the person will blame himself. Neither position provides a healthy outcome. Many people have forsaken God out of anger. Others live in depression and guilt.

In the end, God did not respond to Job’s arrogant demands. In fact, Job did not ask any of his questions, but God interrogated him in Job 38-41. God's response and interrogation of Job does not go well for Job. God highlighted Job's arrogance and his insignificance with regards to God's creation and wisdom. In the end, Job recognized his arrogance and apologized to God in Job 42:1-6

NIV Job 42:1-6 Then Job replied to the LORD: “I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted. You asked, ‘Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?’ Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. “You said, ‘Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.’ My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I **despise** אָנָּה myself and repent in dust and ashes.”

The apology reflected Job’s submission and his failure to receive the answer to the all-consuming question of “Why?” The Hebrew word אָנָּה (Qal imperfect first person common singular - *m’s*)

has a semantic range that includes the following - abhor, disregard, disrespect, despise, reject, or refuse. “Determining the basic meaning of *m*’s is not so easy, since the various context require choosing from a wide assortment of possible translations.”<sup>7</sup> The contextual setting lends itself to self-recrimination. As discussed above, this leads to blame and depression that can lead to anger. Job accepted God’s non-answer and despised himself for questioning God. Believers encounter tragedies that overwhelm them and do not have the face-to-face encounter such as Job’s.

Job is not the only person in the O.T. to challenge the status quo concerning Blessings and Cursings. The author of Ecclesiastes struggled with the same problem.

NIV Ecclesiastes 8:14 There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: the righteous who get what the wicked deserve, and the wicked who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless.

The challenge set before the modern-day believer has never been greater. The Church must deal with cultural attacks upon the existence of God and His Goodness. Shaken believers see these attacks and struggle to formulate a coherent worldview. Cognitive Dissonance leads to doubt and despair. Some never recover from the pain and disillusion. How should the Church approach this dilemma? Rom. 8:28 may supply some level of comfort.

KJV Romans 8:28 And we know that all things **work together** for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

NAS Romans 8:28 And we know that God **causes** all things **to work** together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

NIV Romans 8:28 And we know that in all things God **works** for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

The NAS translated *συνεργέω* (*synergeō*) as “he caused to work.” This could imply that God causes terrible things to happen in order to bring about good. This provides room to blame God for all evil that people encounter. The NIV suggests that when terrible things happen, God works through the evil, and in the end, good reigns supreme. God does not cause nor create evil for believers, but the believer lives in a fallen world that struggles against evil.

### **Conclusion:**

At times the evil penetrates the life of believers, causing great distress. The enemy urges the believer to blame God in the hope of distracting, undermining, and inflicting cognitive

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<sup>7</sup> Siegfried Wagner and Heinz-Josef Fabry, “sa;m’,” ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. Douglas W. Stott, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 47.

dissonance. Neither Job nor any of the other canonical books provide a solution to the "Why" question. Those who claim that they have the answer have not studied the Book of Job. God does not guarantee believers a life devoid of suffering. The Old Testament understood that suffering resulted from sin and rebellion against God and blessings the results of righteousness. Job's suffering negated this theological paradigm and supports an alternative view that suffering should not be linked to sin. In fact, Jesus proclaimed that by following him, believers would, at times, suffer the heavy hand of persecution for his name.

## THE CASE FOR GODLINESS

David Craun, Ed.S.

Currently, we live in a predominately secular society that lives more for pleasure, self-gratification, and “have it your way” philosophy. Modernism and post-modern thought have permeated most of society – even in many of our Christian houses of worship. Though our “gods” may not be made out of silver, gold, pottery, or carved material, they nevertheless bid us give them homage. They make demands for our attention and vested emotions: wealth, fame, fortune, prestige call us to compromise our once held beliefs.

In effect, the world we live in is not much different from that of New Testament times. Here in the USA, we may not be imprisoned or physically executed for our faith, but we are often marginalized, shunned, belittled, and frustrated because of how we are treated. In the world of academics, this is also true. If we try to reference the Bible as authoritative for faith and practice for life, we are often deemed to have less knowledge, understanding, or maybe thought to be excessive, exclusive, or even bigoted. The assumptions we hold as normal do not even show up on the radar screen of the modern secularist.

As a traditional Pentecostal in heritage and practice, I understand the roots of my religious upbringing. It was not much different from some other traditions such as Wesley (Methodist), Puritan, and the Holiness Movement that led to the Azusa Street and other revivals at the turn of the last century (See my article titled “Wind in the Fire”<sup>1</sup> in *The Journal of Biblical Pentecostalism*). I also realize that religious movements change over time and often become something other than what the founders envisioned. Would the founders of early Pentecostal fellowships recognize our worship and faith to be anywhere close to what they practiced? How do we maintain the “faith of our fathers: in a culturally changing world so fast?

How did a seemingly insignificant counter-cultural religion change the known world of its day? What was it that turned the heads of the philosopher, public leader, local cleric, and everyday “Joe” of the first century? I propose that it was “*eusebeia*” – godliness. I wish to explore this concept as it was in the day of the early apostles, and hopefully, explore its possibilities for today's world by making **the case for godliness**.

But what is godliness? What does it really look like? Jerry Bridges gives a good description in his book *The Practice of Godliness*:

The New Testament word for godliness, in its original meaning, conveys the idea of it, a personal attitude toward God that results in actions that are pleasing to him. This personal attitude toward God is what we call devotion to God. But it is always *devotion in action*. It is not just a warm, emotional feeling about God, the kind of feeling we may get while singing some grand old hymn of praise or some modern-day chorus of worship. Neither is devotion to God merely a time of private Bible reading and prayer, a practice we sometimes call “devotions.”...Devotion to God, then, is the mainspring of godly character. And this devotion is the only motivation for Christian behavior that is pleasing to God. This motivation separates the godly person from the moral person, the benevolent person, or the zealous

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<sup>1</sup> David Craun, “Wind in the Fire,” *The Journal of Biblical Pentecostalism*, v.1, issue 1, (Summer 2020): 73

person. The godly person is moral, benevolent, and zealous because of his devotion to God. And his life takes on a dimension that reflects the very stamp of God.<sup>2</sup>

In his commentary on I Timothy 3:16, Gordon Fee writes: "The word **godliness** ... ordinarily refers to "the duty which people owe to God." But here ... it is not referring to the quality of "godliness" as such but "the godliness," thought of in a more objective way as the content or basis of Christianity."<sup>3</sup> Fee further states, "... The word *eusebeia* ("true godliness") is used throughout 1 Timothy to express genuine Christian faith- the truth and its visible expression."<sup>4</sup>

A further description of godliness is described as:

The word "godliness" comes from a Greek stem *seb-*, which meant originally "to step back from someone or something, to maintain a distance," then "to have awe at something, especially something lofty and sublime." This stem is combined with *eu-* ("abundance, fullness of") to form *eusebeia*, which means in classical Greek, "awe, respect for the divine, for the social order." In the New Testament, the word is used in the sense of "awesome respect accorded to God, devoutness, piety, godliness." The word group appears as a verb, an adjective, and an adverb. Paul also contrasts for us the opposite of godliness (*asebeia*): "godless, ungodliness, impiety." ... The idea that best expresses ... godliness in the Pastoral Epistles is the Old Testament expression, "to fear the Lord," which was almost a synonym of "believer" under the Old Covenant. Someone who fears the Lord does not live in terror of God but has a healthy respect for God and seeks in both heart and action to "love God" and not be offensive to God.<sup>5</sup>

From this, we can see that godliness has to do with attitude and behavior. It is somewhat like the description James makes about faith: "Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." (James 2:17 NKJV)<sup>6</sup> Godliness exists only as it is practiced as a way of life. It is more than what we talk about or may even preach – it is how we live out our lives. Webster defines it the following way:

GOD'LY, a. *god-like* Pious; reverencing God, and his character and laws.

1. Living in obedience to God's commands, from a principle of love to him and reverence of his character and precepts; religious; righteous; as a godly person.
2. Pious; conformed to God's law; as a godly life.

GOD'LY, adv. Piously; righteously.

All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. 2 Tim.3.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> "The Practice of Godliness," NavPress, accessed September 15, 2021, <https://bible.org/article/what-godliness>

<sup>3</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Understanding the Bible Commentary: 1 & 2 Timothy Titus*, Grand Rapids Michigan, Baker Books, 1988, 92

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 103-104

<sup>5</sup> "godliness," Jesuswalk, accessed September 15, 2021, <http://www.jesuswalk.com/timothy/godliness.htm>

<sup>6</sup> NKJV references are from, New King James Version; Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1982

<sup>7</sup> <https://av1611.com/kjbp/kjvdictionary/godliness.html#:~:text=1.%20A%20religious%20life%3B%20a%20careful%20observance%20of,Godliness%20is%20profitable%20unto%20all%20things.%201%20Tim.,> accessed September 16, 2021.



But I propose godliness is more than being religious (although that may be how the ungodly would describe it). Paul writes that people can have a "form of godliness, but denying its power" (II Timothy 3:5 NKJV). Religious people may practice outward, ritualistic forms of worship but may be void of heart relationship that is the motivation of life and practice of faith. They carry the title "hypocrite." Again scripture speaks of God looking at one's heart, not his outward appearance (I Samuel 16:7 NKJV).

If, in fact, godliness played a major role in transforming a pagan world to one that honored Christian values as the ideal life, then how was it lived out then, and how should it be lived out in our society today to bring about cultural transformation? I believe the history of spiritual renewal gives us a glimpse that becomes a prescription that, when applied to life experience, will help us verify our case for godliness as the means to see a cultural change that honors God in all aspects of life. *Christianity Today* has an interesting and relevant article:

Spiritual awakenings, whether in biblical or Church history, manifest similar patterns, often strikingly so. While all of the following elements may not be present in each instance, for the most part, awakenings progress through a cycle whose phases include these various aspects of God's working.

**1) Awakenings are usually preceded by a time of spiritual depression, apathy, and gross sin, in which a majority of nominal Christians are hardly different from the members of secular society, and the churches seem to be asleep.**

*The causes of each decline differ widely, but when the prophetic voice and moral leadership of the Church have been stilled for some time, social evils are usually rampant. Eighteenth-century England is an excellent example. Alcoholism was at an all-time high, capital punishment was used routinely for trivial crimes, slavery was practiced throughout the British Empire, and churches were out of touch. The Evangelical Awakening led by John Wesley and George Whitefield aroused the English conscience and cured these and many other ills by direct political pressure and action.*

**2) An individual or small group of God's people becomes conscious of their sins and backslidden conditions and vows to forsake all that is displeasing to God.**

*Christians recall past outpourings of God's grace and power and long to see them again. When histories of awakenings have been written in later years, it has been occasionally discovered that **individuals at great distances and completely unknown to each other had, prior to the awakening, been praying simultaneously to the same end!***

**3) As some Christians begin to yearn for a manifestation of God's power, a leader or leaders arise with prophetic insights into the causes and remedies ...<sup>8</sup>**

Notice the observation that "nominal Christians are hardly different from the members of secular society." What is this society that we are to be different from? How are we to be different? The phrase "we are to be in the world but not of the world" has been passed around many years from

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-23/patterns-of-spiritual-renewal.html>, accessed September 16, 2021

time to time. What makes those who are godly in Christ Jesus different from the “world?” How do we describe in modern terms those who are the “ungodly?”

Three prevailing philosophies tend to dominate modern society: humanism, secularism, and post-modernism. Humanism is described as a “system of education and mode of inquiry that originated in northern Italy during the 13th and 14th centuries and later spread through continental Europe and England. The term is alternatively applied to a variety of Western beliefs, methods, and philosophies that place central emphasis on the human realm.”<sup>9</sup>

In Modern Secularism by Denys G. M. Jackson, M. A. Secularism has been described as “In a word, in '**emancipating' man from Divine Authority**, modern secularism has begun a process towards what has been well called the 'insectification' of the human community, which is the total absorption of the life of the person in the life and activities of the hive within which alone it can have 'meaning.' 'Modern thought' moves already in the direction of giving the state full control of its members' bodies and minds.”<sup>10</sup>

Further, we of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have been described as being in a post-modern society.

“The term "postmodernism" literally means "after modernism" and is used to philosophically describe the current era, which came after the age of modernism. Postmodernism is a reaction (or perhaps more appropriately, a disillusioned response) to modernism’s failed promise of using human reason alone to better mankind and make the world a better place. Because one of modernism’s beliefs was that absolutes did indeed exist, postmodernism seeks to “correct” things by first eliminating absolute truth and making everything (including the empirical sciences and religion) relative to an individual’s beliefs and desires. The dangers of postmodernism can be viewed as a downward spiral that begins with the rejection of absolute truth, which then leads to a loss of distinctions in matters of religion and faith, and culminates in a philosophy of religious pluralism that says no faith or religion is objectively true and therefore no one can claim his or her religion is true and another is false.”<sup>11</sup>

In the realm of the church and Christianity, postmodern thinking has also made its way to the forefront. It has become harder and harder to separate true biblical values from those that post-modern Christianity has influenced because so many Christians have very little first-hand knowledge of what the Bible actually says. They depend upon others to interpret a biblical meaning for them and divide themselves into various “camps” that are led by some personality that champions their particular view or interpretation.

Post-modern Christianity is just as difficult to lock down in a concise definition as post-modernism itself. The art and literary world soon adopted what started in the 1950s in architecture as a reaction to modernist thought and style in the 1970s and 1980s. The Church did not really feel this effect until the 1990s. This reaction was a dissolution of "cold, hard fact" in favor of "warm, fuzzy subjectivity." Think of anything considered post-modern, then

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/humanism>, accessed September 16, 2021.

<sup>10</sup> [www.ecatholic2000.com/cts/untitled-294.shtml](http://www.ecatholic2000.com/cts/untitled-294.shtml), accessed September 18, 2021

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/postmodernism-dangers.html>, accessed September 18, 2021

stick Christianity into that context, and you have a glimpse of what post-modern Christianity is.

Post-modern Christianity falls in line with basic post-modernist thinking. It is about the experience over reason, subjectivity over objectivity, spirituality over religion, images over words, outward over inward. Are these things good? Sure. Are these things bad? Sure. It all depends on how far from biblical truth each reaction against modernity takes one's faith. This, of course, is up to each believer. However, when groups form under such thinking, theology and doctrine tend to lean more towards liberalism.

For example, because experience is valued more highly than reason, truth becomes relative. This opens up all kinds of problems, as this lessens the standard that the Bible contains absolute truth and even disqualifies biblical truth as being absolute in many cases. If the Bible is not our source for absolute truth, and personal experience can define and interpret what truth actually is, saving faith in Jesus Christ is rendered meaningless.<sup>12</sup>

When we look at this idea, it can be seen that it is in direct conflict with a biblical worldview.

“...Christianity claims to be universally true in what it says regarding man’s lost condition before God, the sacrifice of Christ on behalf of fallen mankind, and the separation between God and anyone who chooses not to accept what God says about sin and the need for repentance. When Paul addressed the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers on Mars Hill, he said, “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent” (Acts 17:30). Paul’s declaration was not “this is true for me, but may not be true for you”; rather, it was an exclusive and universal command (that is, a metanarrative) from God to everyone. Any postmodernist who says Paul is wrong is committing an error against his own pluralistic philosophy, which says no faith or religion is incorrect. Once again, the postmodernist violates his own view that every religion is equally true.”<sup>13</sup>

These philosophies that permeate our society today explain the political and educational roller-coaster of the lack of a biblical worldview of life. How can the church (believers) make an impact on society when they are no different? In reality, I do not believe they can. It was a fact that early Pentecostals were different from those "nominal Christians" around them. They talked differently, acted differently, had different priorities in life, and actually practiced biblical values in their everyday experience – at work, at play, in the home – not just while at church. Godliness was a real part of life each day of the week.

What is it that we are to be "called out" from that makes for godliness? When I was growing up in a traditional Pentecostal experience through the local Assemblies of God church, I heard the phrase that was cited from the scripture that we were to be a "peculiar people." Titus 2:14 and I Peter 2:9 were topics of sermons and ideas circulated around Pentecostal churches to encourage

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/post-modern-Christianity.html>, accessed September 18, 2021

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*

and justify being different from the society around us. The King James Version translates the word as “peculiar.” The New King James says “special” people.” This is the Greek word “περιούσιον,”<sup>14</sup> which carries the idea of “being of his own.” It is composed of two base words meaning “I exist” and “completeness” or “above” or “against.” It is similar to the idea of the answer that God gave to Moses when Moses asked who should I tell them has sent me. God’s answer was “I am who I am” (Exodus 3:14). If we are indeed the body of Christ to be His representatives here on Earth, then we should also reflect His nature and character - A people “zealous for good works,” as Paul explains it to Titus. (Titus 2:14b NKJV)

Peter describes it this way: “but you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own **special people**, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;” (I Peter 2:9 NKJV) Peter goes on to give this admonition: “Beloved I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.” (I Peter 2: 11&12 NKJV) Peter associates our place as being a “special people” with the need to practice a lifestyle that abstains for pleasing the physical desires of our natural person and practice a lifestyle of “good works which they observe.” Notice that it is observable “good works” that gives proof of godliness.

Growing up as a Pentecostal, when we were not well understood by those who did not have the "Pentecostal" experience, we were often made fun of or were called names. One of those names was “Holy Roller.” More than once, teenagers my age would ride by the church in the evenings and throw rotten eggs or tomatoes at the church door. They thought it was fun, but now I know it was because of ignorance. Some of those same teens attended traditional denominational churches whose leadership also had very little understanding of the Pentecostal experience.

One day after school, when I was on the school bus waiting to go home, a classmate who was also in the school band with me plopped down on the seat beside me and blurted out: "Are you one of those Holy Rollers?" Without thinking, I replied: "I sure am; wouldn't you roll too if you had a chance to be holy?" It was not a theologically correct answer, but it satisfied the curiosity of the inquirer. Something about the way I lived out my life in front of the other band members was noticed. One of my habits was to carry a pocket New Testament with me to school. Every chance I had in between classes, or in homeroom, I would open it up and read scripture: not out loud, not to make a show of it, but simply because I was hungry to know what God's Word said. I did not hide what I was doing, neither did I flaunt it. Yet, others took notice. My classmates voted me to be the “Most Studious” even though I was only an A/B student. I almost flunked Geometry. I really believe it was because they knew that I was always reading my little pocket Bible. This was my own experience of living out **the case for godliness**. It was the way I practiced my beliefs that caught the attention of my classmates.

To better understand how our modern society is much like that of Paul the Apostle's day, one needs to be able to take off the disguises we have used to cover up our modern-day idolatry. If idolatry is basically anything that replaces God in our life, then the call to forsake our modern idols needs to be made loud and clear. Churchplants.com gives us five tests for idolatry:

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.logosapostolic.org/interlinear-nt/titus/02.htm>, accessed October 25, 2021.

1. The test of time and attention. How much time, devotion, and unquestioned loyalty do I give to this "diversion"? What about passion and intensity of devotion and depth of loyalty? How much time and money go into this adulation and at the expense of what other things?
2. The test of the willingness to question and evaluate. Do I ever—and am I willing to—step back and question my loyalty? To ask where the line is between interest and worship, and how we know when we cross that line? Especially: To question our loyalties and dedications by the light of the biblical prophets?
3. The test of public signs of devotion. Devotees of gods commonly make their devotion public through their behavior, clothing, and emblems. They give public displays, advertising where their loyalties lie so that everyone will know, and there will be no confusion. These often take the form of logos, flags, caps, T-shirts, and other clothing items. Over the past week or month, what loyalties have I publicly advertised?
4. The test of comparative devotion with other gods or loyalties. For example, loyalty and devotion to Jesus Christ. What comes out on top if I evaluate my interests, time and money use, amount, and intensity of attention? What is second, third, fourth? Whatever is on top is your or my functional god, and the others are proof of polytheism.
5. The test of ethical effects. What behaviors follow from my worship (interest, hobby, avocation, relationship, whatever)? Are we ethically sensitive to the effects of our devotions? Or does my loyalty produce ethical insensitivity—most especially, insensitivity to the virtues and values of the Gospel of the kingdom of God?<sup>15</sup>

These tests can be applied to every area of our lives. However, it is difficult to properly be truthful if we first do not have a solid foundation in the Word of God. What can become an idol for one person may be a casual interest for another. Some activities and involvements are clearly stated in the Bible as "ungodly," and believers should abstain from them. However, the Bible does not speak specifically to every aspect of modern life. Yet, it is still relevant for life and the practice of faith. ChurchPlant.com gives some specific illustrations of modern-day idols that are worth citing here:

#### America's Top Gods

Here are North America's seven most popular gods. By "god," I mean something (anything) in our life that commands more loyalty, dedication, and devotion than the one true Living God. Not necessarily the highest loyalty, since many of us are functional polytheists, whatever we claim. But sincere and central devotion.

The question then becomes: What is your or my functional pantheon?

From the biblical perspective, of course, such "gods" are really idols. Idols that the Bible both denounces and mocks.

The following are America's gods today, in reverse order:

#### 7. **National Security**

Yes, for some people, this is the One High God ("My Country, Right or Wrong"). It is a much higher god since the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the passage of the (idolatrous? blasphemous?)

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<sup>15</sup> <https://churchplants.com/articles/6455-the-top-7-gods-americans-worship.html>, accessed September 18, 2021

Patriot Act. Anything done in the name of national security, or now by the NSA, is by definition justified since the end justifies the means. National Security in the U.S. is the new name of the old god of Nationalism. But for many in the U.S., this is not the High God. It is one among many, and it nudges out the other gods only in times of clear threat and crisis. This is one of the so-called gods that the Bible denounces. Read Ezekiel.

#### **6. Money, Riches, Wealth**

This is still a much-adored and sought-after god in the United States. The pursuit of wealth was one of the two founding pillars of the United States, and of course, this is still in place. But it is now so taken for granted—so unquestioned—that the worship of this god is a little less prominent. This god is also called Mammon, which Jesus referred to in Matthew 6:24 when he said, “You cannot serve God and Mammon.” (Was he wrong?) However, the rise of technology has birthed other gods, so Money is a bit less adored than in times past.

#### **5. Guns**

The worship of guns in the U.S. is fully obvious and well-known globally, though quite puzzling to many folks in other countries, including Canada. A few months ago, *The Economist* magazine from the U.K. ran a cartoon depicting a church service, which was actually a worship-of-guns service, in America.

How America’s gun culture developed is well documented in Michael Bellesiles’ *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture* (2000) and other sources. All it took to turn fascination with guns (primarily by males) into a religion linked it up with the U.S.

Constitution's Second Amendment.

Today, all the marks of religion are evident when one either confronts a gun devotee or questions anything about this devotion. (For clarity: I am not speaking about legitimate limited uses of firearms but the deification of the gun.)

I know many folks would rank this idolatry higher, closer to the top. For many Americans, it is indeed Top God. But the number of devotees is actually a minority of the total population, so I rank it here.

#### **4. The Automobile**

This beautiful and more and more glitzy and gadgety god has been around now for over a century. Historians talk about "America's love affair with the automobile." The automobile quickly became a symbol of money, sex, and power, with a clear hierarchy identifiable by model and price—a divider of the haves from the have-nots. When the automobile moves from being a means of transportation to something more, a hierarchical status symbol, deification is complete. The marks of worship, from temples to worship rallies to lavish offerings, become obvious. Our casual obliviousness to the sacrifice of thousands of lives on our highways is another sign (32,000 last year—adult and child sacrifice). But we are not yet at the top.

#### **3. Fame and Celebrity**

Celebrity has been around for a long time—going back at least to Absalom, the Old Testament’s most famous celebrity, with his clever charm and his beautiful black flowing hair. But modern technology—printing of course, but especially movies, radio, TV, and now the Internet—have given the Castor-and-Pollux god of Fame-and-Celebrity new prominence. So now fame and celebrity are largely unquestioned, even among Christians. Being famous is always better than not being, and becoming a celebrity is always something to be applauded.

Therefore, I aspired to become one. In this value system, seeking obscurity is dumb. Becoming "less so that others may become more" is irrational, suspect, and likely a sign of mental derangement. Many parents will sacrifice virtually anything for the chance for their child to become famous—whether in entertainment, sports, or even academia. (Ever seen a child beauty pageant?) Note that the high god here is not money but rather fame-and-celebrity.

## 2. Collegiate Sports

Collegiate sports is, of course, a way to achieve fame, celebrity, and wealth—at least potentially. Compare the salaries and perks of university head coaches and athletic directors with those of presidents and deans as the first indicator of this idolatry. Look at sports and media budgets. But there are many other signs. Collegiate sports have become a whole elaborate high-tech profit-making system—a business, really—with big winners and many losers. From the outside looking in, the idolatry is obvious. From the inside, even to raise the question appears extreme, unjustified, irrational.

### 1. Professional Sports

This is America's Top God at the moment. Not 50 years ago, but now. The growing popularity of and devotion to this god has happened so gradually that millions have not noticed the seduction. Instead, what they see is high-tech glitz powered by advertising megadollars. Professional sports have it all: Money, fame, sex, technology, and immense and growing economic clout. It is professional sports, of course, that powers collegiate sports—to the point where the line between "professional" and "amateur" is often a joke. College sports power high-school sports—which power grade-school sports. A huge, interlocking system, a hierarchy.

Result: Today, one of the most obscene, disturbing scenes on TV, the Internet, or on a sports field is not sex or violence. It is a small boy, barely into grade school, nearly lost in a football helmet and uniform, being socialized into a culture and worldview that is artificial, unhealthy, and ultimately demeaning. Trapped in a uniform and trapped in a deadly culture. It is a tragedy and training in idolatry—actually a form of spiritual formation (or malformation). Among many other things, this form of unrecognized child abuse insulates (literally) your child from normal, unprogrammed interaction with the natural world of trees, flowers, birds, rivers, and dirt—God's good creation.<sup>16</sup>

What can I say about America's (and the rest of the world's) fascination with technology? Too many in all generations are spending a huge amount of their time with a screen of one type or another in their face. I am not talking about using technology to produce goods and services. I refer to the "recreational" fascination with screens. In my generation, it was TV. My parents went through the Great Depression and WWII; it was the radio and then the TV. Three and four-year-olds are given a "phone" with games downloaded to keep them busy and out of their parent's way. Children will not know how to live without a screen in front of them. Now social media, video games, and other time absorption uses of technology demand our time and attention. Can technology be good? Yes indeed! Can it draw us away from a life of godliness? Most assuredly!

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<sup>16</sup> *ibid*

I include this list to illustrate how easy it is for anyone to replace our devotion to the Lord with other things in our lives. Any one of the items listed above can become an idol but is not necessarily so. We can be patriotic and appreciative of the blessings our country affords us without fixating on our national security. We can enjoy football, baseball, basketball, or other sports game without it becoming obsessive or becoming idolatrous. Yet, too often, these very enjoyments slowly began to take priority in our lives. When church leadership closes down the Sunday evening service because it is the playoffs of a sports event or the Super Bowl and they know most people will not come to church, but be watching the game, we have bowed down to the sports idol. Sure, we make all kinds of excuses, but in the end, we are involved in idol worship.

As a minister who has devoted my life to training leaders to work with children and youth (especially Royal Rangers), I can attest to the very subtle influence that these “gods” have had to draw many away from their faith as a young child – even those who have been “raised” in church. Too often, I have seen parents choose to have their child participate in a school activity such as sports, scholastic, or other functions even when it conflicts with church activities. These activities willfully conflict with religious practices and times of worship where a participant has to choose the activity or the church.

In the past, this was not the case. In my own experience, as a participant in the school band, my band director knew that I would not be at any game or event that was scheduled on a church night. He made the schedule around regular church events. That is not the case now! Which god (God) will you serve? Our American culture has increasingly become more pagan and anti-Christian. Our public educational system is many times hostile to Christian values and dares a true believer to protest the “system.” Is this because “nominal” Christians have failed to practice true godliness in their public life? Are we living out our values to the point that people will ask: “Are you one of those Holy Rollers?”

The statistics verify that the church has not done as good of a job as it should at retaining youth once they are out of high school and off to college or the world of work as an adult. This is not a new problem. Many times youth feel disconnected from adult church life. Too often, denominational and individual church practices foster this disconnection. In an attempt to relate to teens by having "Youth Ministry" that focuses on activities instead of building biblical character and godliness, church leadership actually sets up a scenario that creates a void when those individuals are no longer youth. Young people become "cultural Christians" associated with a church but not necessarily born again with a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and a love for his Word. Also, when children become too old to stay in "Children's Church" (which is participatory in many cases) and are required to attend the adult service (which is a spectator event), they do not know how to participate personally. If they have not developed a practice of "hiding the word of God in their heart" through a personal relationship with the living "Word of God," too often they become cultural Christians who come and participate in the functions of the church, but do not follow through once they leave home after graduating high school.

Some research that exists currently by Lifeway will verify what I have said:

According to a new study from Nashville-based Lifeway Research, two-thirds (66 percent) of American young adults who attended a Protestant church regularly for at least a year as a teenager say they also dropped out for at least a year between the ages of 18 and 22 Lifeway



Research. Thirty-four percent say they continued to attend twice a month or more....“The reality is that Protestant churches continue to see the new generation walk away as young adults. Regardless of any external factors, the Protestant church is slowly shrinking from within.”.... “What the research tells us may be even more concerning for Protestant churches: there was nothing about the church experience or faith foundation of those teenagers that caused them to seek out a connection to a local church once they entered a new phase of life. The time they spent with activity in church was simply replaced by something else.”<sup>17</sup>

“...activity in church was simply replaced by something else.” I contend that if those activities are not based on demonstrating true godliness, they will be replaced with something else when given the opportunity. True godliness is born out of a relationship with Christ, not activities that mirror society at large. The church may not have really lost those teens when they became adults – they already had lost them because they were there for the activities, not the relationship with Christ. The scripture does talk about the road to eternal life being straight and narrow, and few people will be on it. As believers, it is up to us to live a life that models godliness in the hope that others will want the relationship with Christ that makes godliness possible. But, each person must decide for themselves if they will “take up their cross...” (Matthew 16:24)

Research has demonstrated several ways that are effective at keeping youth active in the life of the Church. There are seven in this list from Lifeway Research, but I would like to comment on just a few from my own experience as a lead (senior) pastor for 14 years.

- 1. Develop an intentional transition.**
- 2. Create an advisory board.**
- 3. Help them discover and use their spiritual gifts.**
- 4. Give them responsibilities.**
- 6. Involve them with the student or children’s ministry.**
- 7. Let them teach.**<sup>18</sup>

I believe numbers 3-7 in the above list are somewhat related. It is involvement firsthand by the youth of the church. They need to know that there is a place for them, that they are needed and wanted, and that they have a purpose. The church needs to provide purpose and a direction, and a value system solidly founded in the Word of God. Youth need to be able to apply godliness in practical, everyday (weekly) settings because true godliness is not just ideas or ideals; it is the practical application of Christian values. There is really no godliness outside of living our lives all out for the Lord: all the way commitment – being “crucified to the flesh” as Paul writes in Galatians chapter 5. Verses 22&23 list the fruit of Spirit before Paul writes that “those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” (Galatians 5:22-24 NKJV) Godliness will be manifested in the form of the fruit of the Spirit.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://lifewayresearch.com/2019/01/15/most-teenagers-drop-out-of-church-as-young-adults/>, accessed September 18, 2021

<sup>18</sup> <https://lifewayresearch.com/2019/03/06/7-ways-to-keep-young-adults-invested-in-your-church/>, accessed September 18, 2021

At the church where I pastored, about 80% of the congregation was involved in some form of ministry or service to the community. That included our teens. Some were part of the orchestra, and others assisted in teaching Sunday School. Still, others helped with the nursery, Jr. ushers, greeters, etc. Wherever they felt they could be of value to others in the church, we would give them training and help equip them to become successful. They participated in community outreaches and were involved in school clubs. I do not know where all of them are or if they are all living for the Lord now, but I do know that two are ministers, one a missionary, one a church secretary, one a church board member, and several others faithful members of various churches. Because they were given a place of service to the Lord as teenagers, they continue to serve God as adults. Christianity is NOT a spectator sport where we come to watch the show once a week. True godliness MUST be lived out daily.

To conclude **the case for godliness**, I would point the reader to six values addressed in Scripture that I believe express godliness in action.

The first concept is our speech. Paul, the apostle, states: "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers." (Ephesians 4:29 NKJV) Our manner of speech is a dead giveaway to indicate whether godliness is a value we hold dear or not. Jesus expressed it this way in the Sermon on the Mount. You have heard it said...but I say unto you. When it came to how we talk, he said that those who follow him are not to swear at all. He followed it up with this summary about how we are to speak: "But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes' and your 'No' be 'No'. For whatever is more than these is from the evil one." (Matthew 5:37 NKJV)

Having been a Christian in a conservative Pentecostal group for 69 years, I have seen a decline in wholesome speech. Most conservatives will refrain from crude curse words in general conversation. (That is not to say that they may regress to it when mad, very agitated, or frightened.) What I have noticed in the past decade is a proliferation of substitute by-words that many "conservatives" see as normal speech now. The use of "Heck!" to replace "Hell!" as an expletive is commonplace. They may use abbreviations such as "GD it" or "BS" to express displeasure. If we are to practice true godliness that contrasts the prevailing culture of our times, we must show it in our speech.

The second value is our actions. The old saying "Actions speak louder than words" has a lot of truth to it. True integrity also sees our actions to be consistent in church as well as out of church: at home, on the job, at play, with friends, as well as strangers. Paul writes to the church at Corinth: "...whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God." (I Corinthians 10:31b NKJV) Though this was specifically concerning eating, the principle applies to other behaviors as well. For the godly, our actions are all about giving God glory. Does what we do glorify God, or is our motivation to magnify self or another individual? In another letter, Paul writes to the church at Colosse: "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." (Colossians 3:17 NKJV) If we talk like, look like, act like the culture of the world around us, how will they see Christ in us as the "hope of glory"? They do not!

But Jesus went well beyond speech and outward behaviors. Jesus spoke to what I consider to be the third indicator of true godliness: motives. Jesus often condemned the actions of the religious leaders because even though they were attempting to keep the letter of the Law, their heart motivations were far from the heart of God. Many times in the Gospels, we read the words

of Jesus: "Woe to you, scribes, and Pharisees – hypocrites." Then he would call them out for doing actions with the wrong motivation. I see Scripture placing this under the broad heading of "love." Jesus said it this way: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, . . . and the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:37 & 39 NKJV) In the Epistle of John, we see this expounded upon: "He who does not love does not know God, for God is love." (I John 4:8 NKJV) The overarching motivation for godliness is love – not the physical emotion we may have for another, but a true adoration and admiration of our Lord. When we have this as our motivation, then true godliness will spring forth out of our hearts. I referenced the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) earlier, but it comes into play here. That fruit has as its outside covering love, expressed joyfully, with a heart of peace and an attitude of longsuffering. It is known by its kindness, its goodness, its faithfulness, its gentleness, all wrapped up in the package of self-control. Motivation is an intuitive concept that drives the inner person in all they say and do. God does see the heart of mankind and truly knows the motivating forces that bring us to action. It is this motivation of love for the Lord and love for others that expresses itself as godliness.

The fourth factor is attitude. Motivation is closely connected with our attitude or inner spirit. Paul writes to the church at Ephesus, "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind." (Ephesians 4:23 NKJV) The NIV translates this word "spirit" as "attitude." This is the Greek word "πνευμά" (pneuma) meaning wind, spirit, breath: the immaterial part of the inner person that can respond to God."<sup>19</sup> In this context, it means "attitude." People who express a "bad attitude" do not demonstrate godliness. Too often, we destroy the effects of what we say and even how we act by manifesting the wrong type of attitude. The NIV translated Ephesians 4:23 as "be made new in the attitude of your mind." Those who live godly in Christ will have a new attitude because they have the "mind of Christ." (I Corinthians 2:16b NKJV)

The fifth aspect that I consider expressing a godly life is faith, or how we express our beliefs. At this stage in my life, I try to simplify the way I understand Scripture. I have come to realize that faith is simply obedience. The opposite is also true: sin is disobedience. Yes, I know the verses that define faith as substance and evidence. I am not discounting them. However, when I look at the way Hebrews chapter 11 illustrates this definition, these men and women of faith all end up simply obeying what God told them to do: Abraham left Ur for a land of Promise, Moses forsook Egypt, kept the Passover, and passed through the Red Sea on dry ground. The walls of Jericho fell after seven days, Rahab did not perish, and the list goes on and on. In each case, faith was demonstrated by obeying what God had instructed each of them to do. As our Heavenly Father, God is looking for obedience. I mentioned earlier a reference to the book of James. James writes: "...show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith by my works." (James 2:18b NKJV) True godliness is known by those who know how to walk in obedience to the Lord.

Finally, godliness is expressed in a lifestyle of purity: the quality of our lives that does not compromise by mixing in ungodly things. This is similar to what I mentioned about integrity earlier, but I want to focus on being pure: 100% pure means that nothing else is mixed in with

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<sup>19</sup> Edward W. Goodrick & John R. Kohlenberger III, *Zondervan NIV Exhaustive Concordance, 2ed*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1999), ref. 4460 Greek to English Dictionary and Index.

the ingredient. This is where all of us can improve in the goal of being godly. In yet another letter by Paul, the apostle, we read these words: "...whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are **pure**, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of a good report, if there is any virtue, and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things." (Philippians 4:8 NKJV) Notice that Paul admonishes us to meditate on these things. We should consider them often and with a depth of meaning. Purity is a true litmus test for godliness.

How can believers be effective at transmitting their faith to a culture today that shadows very much the pagan world of the early church? I believe it is living out a godly life of joy and peace through our relationship with Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. By the obedience of faith lived out in a world that is desperately searching for meaning and purpose, we who are true believers have the opportunity to live godly lives. This can only be accomplished through the righteousness that is in Christ our Lord. It is by His grace that we are saved. With a goal of godliness, we can impact people's lives one life at a time. This is **the case for godliness**.