Living Godly in This Present World

Let us turn our attention to the Word of God, opening to Titus chapter 2, where we will read from verse 11 to verse 13: *"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."* Amen. It is the grace of God that brings salvation to us all.

This grace urges us to break with sin and with the lusts of the world, guiding us to lead a life of self-control, righteousness and godliness. It has to be said that godliness is a concept often neglected or undervalued by religious people. Through grace, God teaches us to live in godliness. Without understanding godliness and without practising it, we cannot come to a true knowledge of the Lord.

We will look at several passages about godliness to understand how essential it is in our life of faith, and to strive to put it into practice in concrete ways. Let us turn to 2 Peter, chapter 1, and read from verse 2: *"Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue."* Amen.

Let us stop here for a moment. Grace and peace are multiplied to us through the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ. What does it mean to know God? Is it about talking about Him, or about knowing Him personally? We must identify with Him, become one with Him, so that we truly know Him. And through this knowledge, grace and peace are multiplied to us. Is that true? Yes, it is true.

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by His glory and power; He has given us everything. And then, from verse 5: *"And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."* Amen.

Within a few verses, he speaks to us again about the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we have these things abounding in us… let us give all diligence to have godliness. The Word of God tells us other things too. But one of the things God asks of us is to have godliness and to live in this present life soberly, righteously and godly.

It is easy to look in the dictionary and find the definition of godliness. It is easy to know a few things about the Kingdom of God. But it is harder to actually live there. We know the definition of godliness, but it is hard to live in godliness.

Let us also go to Timothy. There are two epistles written by the apostle Paul to Timothy, and one epistle written to Titus. We have already read from Titus, where Paul tells him that grace has appeared to us and teaches us to live godly. And in Paul's first epistle to Timothy, his letter to his dearly beloved son in the faith, we find much teaching about godliness.

We will read from chapter 6, verses 1 to 5: *"Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort. If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself."* Amen.

Looking at verse 3, we see that it is essential to align ourselves with the wholesome words of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the doctrine that leads to godliness. This teaching directs us toward a life of strict obedience.

Verses 1 and 2 speak to us about one aspect of godliness: submission to masters. Being a master or a servant does not automatically mean a relationship of submission, but rather a relationship founded on faith, where the masters are believers. In the apostle Paul's time, there were masters who had become believers and who owned slaves. In the Old Testament, slavery was considered normal. For example, a Hebrew could keep a Hebrew servant for seven years, after which he was obliged to set him free.

At that time, there were people who owned slaves and who were converted to faith in God. And now those who had become believing masters are, as the Word of God says, considered *"faithful and beloved"* brethren. They are not commanded to give up their slaves; on the contrary, the slaves are commanded to be submissive. Submission, or obedience, is an essential part of the doctrine that leads to godliness. If we do not hold to this teaching, we may count ourselves proud and lacking true knowledge. What should we do, then? What does it mean to hold to this teaching? To know it only in theory, or to apply it in our lives?

Verses 1 and 2 urge us to adopt a certain attitude toward others, including toward our employers, now that the yoke of slavery has been abolished. We must treat our bosses or employers with due respect, so that the name of God and His doctrine are not slandered. And if we have believing masters, we must not despise them.

In the relationship between servant and master, what was expected of the servant? Was it enough for him to know in theory how he ought to behave, or did he need actually to live by those expectations in his master's house? Godliness is defined by two major components: strict obedience and admiration. A servant behaves respectfully and with admiration toward his master, carrying out his commands to the letter.

That is the definition of godliness. When we consider the doctrine of godliness from God's perspective and from ours, we must ask ourselves what kind of relationship we have with Him. What is His standing, and what is ours? For it is written in Romans 6, *"being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."* We must receive this doctrine that leads us to godliness.

If we turn to God only out of fear of hell, or because He gives us something, then the doctrine of godliness loses its meaning. We must have a respectful attitude and admire the Lord Jesus.

The Lord Jesus says that, once He is lifted up from the earth, He *"will draw all men unto"* Him, so that we may admire the beauty of His character. That is why He draws us. People will ask us, *"What is thy beloved more than another beloved?"* What does our Beloved have? The Word says: *"men loved darkness rather than light."* What can we say about our Beloved? Does the Light have something more than the darkness? He is the *"King of righteousness"*, and He is not in darkness but in light, being the King of peace.

And verse 5 tells us that there are some people who suppose that gain is godliness. There are people who seem to have respect and admiration, displaying a form of godliness, but when it comes to following the Word of Christ exactly, seriously and rigorously, they draw back, claiming that certain teachings no longer apply or that they do not agree with them.

Verse 5 warns us: *"from such withdraw thyself."* This problem of superficial godliness is also addressed in 2 Timothy chapter 3, where verse 2 urges us to be aware that we too could fall into this trap.

We must have a deep relationship with God, because *"in the last days perilous times shall come."* Men shall be *"lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy."* Verse 5 goes on: *"Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof."* This means that they do not acknowledge God's authority, denying His power and sovereignty, although outwardly they appear godly through the admiration and respect they display.

When we sing songs of praise and thanksgiving, they should be the sincere expression of our hearts, showing our admiration and respect for God. Yet if we are not obedient, we deny the power of God. Scripture urges us to keep away from such people. In verse 12 we are told: *"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."* Amen.

To make it clearer, we could put it this way: *"Yea, and all who want to live with admiration and respect, in strict obedience to Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution."* This is not an isolated situation, or one limited to certain groups, such as the apostles, or to certain parts of the world, such as China, Japan or the Arab countries.

Persecution is a reality for all who choose to live according to the teachings of Christ. In Romania there is the question of whether or not we are persecuted, and if we are, who might be behind it. Could it be the state, the democratic system, a dictatorship, or perhaps the enemy of our souls? This can be seen as a way of testing our faith and our endurance. The question arises

whether there is real persecution, or whether it is only a perception, a challenge in our lives, or whether in fact nothing is happening at all. It is a way of taking stock of where we stand.

Those who want to live godly, in full obedience to Christ, and who admire Him, will suffer persecution. Many religious people have suffered for their faith, but not because they lived godly, that is, in strict obedience to Christ. This raises the question of whether the persecutions some have suffered were because of their godliness or for other reasons, and whether they ever came truly to admire the Lord Jesus and to aspire to be like Him.

Many people admit that they have only been taught admiration and respect for the Lord's sacrifice. This suggests that, although we love to sing and praise the Lord for His sacrifice, we may not have stopped long enough to contemplate the beauty of His character and to understand what godliness really means.

It is important to learn about godliness and the doctrine that leads to it, admiring the Lord Jesus and our Heavenly Father, and living in godliness toward Him. Our admiration must be wholehearted, not merely a superficial form of godliness. To this end, we read from 1 Timothy 3, verses 14 to 16, which teach on this theme: *"These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness."* This is an exhortation to proper conduct within the Christian community, which is seen as a central pillar of the truth.

Godliness is presented as an attitude of respect and strict obedience toward God and Christ, and it is linked with a series of virtues such as faith, knowledge, temperance, patience and humility.

"Great is the mystery of godliness", or *"great is the secret of God"*. This *"mystery"* is bound up with adding virtue to faith, knowledge to virtue, temperance to knowledge and so on, in a chain of virtues that leads to godliness.

Paul urges Timothy to follow after godliness and to refuse *"profane and old wives' fables"*. This is a call to concentrate on obeying and honouring the teachings of Christ.

The scribes and Pharisees in the Lord Jesus' day, although they tried to keep God's Law scrupulously, were rebuked by the Lord Jesus because they failed to truly appreciate His beauty and character. This highlights the difference between rigid observance of the law and true godliness, which involves deep admiration and respect for God.

The scribes were upset because He did not keep the Sabbath strictly, and because His disciples ate without washing their hands and He said nothing to them. From what we can see, they wanted to fulfil God's Law scrupulously.

Someone once said that out of the Ten Commandments they made some 660 others derived from them. And we know today that there are people who will not switch on a light on the Sabbath, or drive a car, or do certain things, trying to fulfil very carefully and strictly the Word of God concerning the Sabbath, *"thou shalt not do any work"*, as the Word of God says, and so on, yet

they do not seek to be godly.

If we do not want to be like the Lord Jesus, to admire Him and to be like Him, all this scrupulous keeping will profit us nothing. We do it in our earthly, fleshly nature. The Word of God says of them in Romans that they *"have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge."*

Certainly, it is a form of godliness. It is the extreme side of godliness, but it is not love. Without love there is nothing there. First comes love, and then comes keeping.

"If ye love me, keep my commandments", or *"if you admire Me and love Me"*. The Song of Songs says: My soul failed when he spake; I was sick of love. That has to come before we begin to keep. Some have gone to the extreme of keeping, and some have gone to the other extreme. For *"bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."* Amen. Godliness, this beautiful trait, is profitable in every way; it has the promise of the life that now is, and also of the life to come, the eternal one.

Let us read a little more from 1 Timothy, chapter 5, verse 4: *"But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God."* Amen.

Full of respect. Respectful and admiring behaviour toward our parents is essential, encouraging us to admire them and obey them in all things. We may ourselves have been in situations, at certain times in our lives, when we obeyed our parents' word not out of godliness but out of fear, obligation or dread, thinking, *"He'll beat me, he won't let me back in the house, if he finds out I did something, what will happen to me?"* and so on. In such cases, we act because the parent's harshness keeps us from doing certain things. But that does not lead us to godliness.

It is not about fear of hell, or about bargaining for rewards such as a mansion or streets of gold, or even about the promise of eternal life without pain. These things do not move me to keep the Word; rather, they move me to praise God and be thankful to Him for what He does for me.

I am thankful for His Son who died for me, and I weep. We see that there are people who do these things. But when it comes to obedience, that is where they stop, and their godliness remains merely an outward form.

In 2 Peter, we are shown that we must add godliness to virtue. It is a teaching that directs us toward godliness. We will go on reading in 1 Timothy, chapter 6, verse 6: *"But godliness with contentment is great gain."* We have the promise of the life that now is and of the one to come. It is no small thing to have this promise when you are godly. If we keep the Word of God, we have the promise of the life to come. *"If a man love me, he will keep my words"*, says the Lord Jesus in John 14:23, *"and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."*

It is an extraordinary promise to be godly, to keep the Word of God scrupulously, but out of admiration, not out of obligation. It is not about struggling and straining, forcing yourself, but

about keeping out of love and admiration for the One you love.

1 Timothy 6:11 exhorts us, saying: *"But thou, O man of God, flee these things"*, referring to the love of money mentioned earlier, and urges us to follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. It is a call to pursue these virtues, to be like the Lord Jesus, as we are called to be. In the doctrine of godliness, love comes first, followed by the strict keeping of the Word.

Turning to chapter 5 of the epistle to the Hebrews, in verse 7 we read about the Lord Jesus: *"Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered."*

This verse shows us that godliness is essential for reaching perfection, not in order to earn a certain grade from God, but in order to take on the character of Christ. Obedience and suffering are paths by which we learn and are made perfect, just as the Lord Jesus was, becoming *"the author of eternal salvation"* unto all them that obey Him.

The goal of godliness is to become like the Lord Jesus, to come unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. To understand His godliness better, we turn to the Gospel of John, chapter 14, where verses 30 and 31 give us a deep insight into the godly character of the Lord Jesus, completing the picture we have from the epistle to the Hebrews.

In these verses, the Lord Jesus expresses the clarity and constancy of His relationship with the Father: *"Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do."* These words underline the Lord Jesus' unwavering devotion to the Father's will, a fundamental trait of His godliness.

The godliness of the Lord Jesus is marked by unconditional love for the Father and complete submission to His commandments. This is the essence of true godliness, which every believer is called to follow, aspiring to the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Lord Jesus.

Let us also read from John 5, to see how the Lord Jesus obeys because He loves the Father. We must pay very close attention! We are called to live in godliness toward the Father, as the Lord Jesus does, and to hold to the doctrine that leads to godliness. Only the godly are pleasing to God, and God hears the godly.

We must not be like the Pharisees, like the hypocrites, but seek to keep every word of God, though not in the way they did. The Lord Jesus tells them plainly: *"If God were your Father, ye would love me"*, and *"my word hath no place in you."*

They did not recognise the Lord Jesus. *"If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also."* So they had a major problem: they kept part of the Law but forgot to do certain essential things in it. Had they admired the Father, they would have recognised that the Father is longsuffering, and they would have seen that the Lord Jesus too bore the Father's

characteristics.

This is the message the Lord Jesus has passed on to us. In the context of the dispute about the Sabbath and the accusations that He was breaking it, the Lord Jesus made clear His relationship with the Father, saying: *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise."* That is verse 19 of John 5.

Further on, in verse 30, the Lord Jesus explains: *"I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me."*

It is instructive to think about how we might apply these words in our own lives, putting ourselves in the Lord Jesus' place and putting the Lord Jesus in the Father's place. So Peter, John or George can do nothing of themselves, but only what they see the Lord Jesus doing, and whatever the Lord Jesus does, they do likewise.

I once talked with a man who told me that, being a father of several children, he had taken paid parental leave to care for a child, and at the same time he wanted to work to add to the family's income. From one point of view, this is normal and understandable.

If the wife looks after the children at home, the husband has the responsibility to provide the income the family needs. It is natural for a father to make sure there is food on the table and warmth in the house. If the income is not enough, he must find ways to put bread on the table for his children.

Yet when we look through the lens of the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, the perspective changes. The original intention of providing food for the children is right, but in the light of God's laws, we must take care not to lose sight of the essential principles.

This man, although he meant to fulfil his responsibilities, did not take every aspect of his situation into account. He went to the local town hall intending to regularise his work situation, saying he wanted to work legally: *"Look, I want to work, and I'd like to do the proper paperwork so I can pay whatever I need to pay."*

But he was told that what he wanted to do was illegal, because he had no right to go to work while he was on parental leave paid for by the state. This man tried to avoid sin, but he did not understand that he had no right to work while receiving state benefit for caring for his child, which is against the law. He did not understand that by his actions he was not becoming like the Lord Jesus, who is our example to follow in every area of life, including integrity and honesty.

This man was in the wrong because he worked while the state was paying him to care for his child, which is contrary to the law. In seeking to become like the Lord Jesus, we must ask ourselves what He would have done in our place and act accordingly. The Lord Jesus was without guile and without falsehood, and we should follow that example: *"The Son can do nothing of himself."*

If someone has applied to the state for child-care benefit, he should not go back on his decision or twist the meaning of his own words, but remain consistent and honest in his decisions. To do otherwise would be to follow a wrong path, one that is not in keeping with God's laws or with the godliness He requires of us.

Guile is associated with the devil, who used it to deceive Adam and Eve, cunningly telling them they would not die, contrary to God's warning: *"Yea, hath God said?"* Our goal as followers of Christ is to reach the point where no idle, rash or crafty words are found in our mouths, following the example of the Lord Jesus, of whom it is said that *"neither was guile found in his mouth."*

This is what the mystery of godliness means, and it is great because we must fulfil the Word of God not merely as men do, but as the Lord Jesus fulfilled it.

When we fulfil it as men do, without the Lord's standard, there are degrees of fulfilment. Some years ago I made myself a narrow way and wanted to walk on it. I walked that way according to certain patterns of narrowness. Others have a different pattern, a narrower one.

An elderly person once told me that in their youth, when they turned to God, they made sure their trousers were so wide at the bottom that their shoes could not be seen when they walked. And they considered this the narrow way. It was a narrow way, but not God's narrow way.

From a human point of view, we can appreciate the seriousness these people wanted to show. Someone said you cannot go up to the pulpit without a jacket on, because somewhere in the Bible it says someone put on his coat. And therefore you cannot preach without a jacket. That too is a narrow way. Even if it is sweltering outside, you still have to preach in your jacket, because you must not break the rule. It is a narrow way. It is a form of godliness, but it is the tradition of men.

We must have strict obedience, but not to men, not to tradition, not to man-made teachings that have been added on. Some take the Lord's Supper at sunset, some at night, some in the morning, and so on. These things give an air of humility and will-worship.

We have been called to godliness, to hold to the doctrine that leads to godliness, and to hold to it we must copy the Lord Jesus, because He was godly. And we must see what He was like: if there was not a trace of guile in Him, then no guile is permitted in our hearts either.

If we do not look at Him that way, then a little guile does not seem so bad after all. Some people used to say, *"I'll make friends with the devil until I'm over the bridge, and then I'll go back to the Lord."* In other words, I'll take up the devil's weapons for five minutes to sort out my problem, and afterwards I'll come back to God. Is that possible?

Let us come back to godliness. Godliness has the promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. *"Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue... and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness."* According to the Word of God, as written in 2 Peter chapter 1, lack of godliness makes us spiritually blind. Let us look closely at this text to understand it better. It is

essential that we strive to lay hold of the teaching that leads us to complete obedience, for only through it can our character grow. If we do not show complete obedience, we face a serious problem.

Let us examine verses 8, 9, 10 and 11 of the same chapter. *"For if these things be in you, and abound"*, and it is godliness that concerns us now, though we must have all the others too, not only godliness, *"they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

These words urge us to be active and fruitful in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us take the example of barrenness and unfruitfulness to understand these ideas better. If we are commanded to make disciples and do not obey, then we are barren and unfruitful, for Scripture says that *"with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."*

Having our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace is part of the armour of God, which helps us stand against the wiles of the devil. If we do not act according to the commandments, we deprive ourselves of godliness and become spiritually idle.

We must follow only what the Word of God teaches us. Those who lack godliness are described as blind, walking with their eyes shut, having forgotten that they were purged from their old sins.

It is crucial that we strive to come to a full knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ and to identify with Him and with His godliness. *"Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."* Amen.

I remember myself, many years ago: I applied the second part of godliness, careful and meticulous obedience to the Word of God, while the first part was fainter, less important, because man is capable of many things.

Man would like to set his own righteousness before God. That is what the Jews did, and that is what people do today. When we do not walk in God's way, we set out on our own. As for us, it could be said that we have zeal, but not according to knowledge. Only by having these things, if we add godliness to all of them, will an entrance be ministered to us abundantly into eternal fellowship.

So let us not run away from obedience, because obedience is very important. But we must know whom we are obeying. Some say, *"the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life"*, and so we must not obey the letter, because it kills us, but only the Spirit. Yet the Lord Jesus says that His words are spirit and life; so if we obey His words, we have life. And we obey the Spirit of God, who brings us the words of the Lord Jesus and gives us life. Great is the mystery of godliness. He has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

We too must live as the Lord Jesus lived: soberly, righteously and godly, as He teaches us. May the Lord help you and me to put the Word of Christ into practice and to think very carefully about John 5:19 and John 5:30. In His humiliation, as we are told elsewhere, His judgment was taken away. He obeyed fully; He was the Son of God. We are the bride of this Son. If the Son obeys fully in all things, how should the bride obey? And now the Church is subject unto Christ, says the Word of God.

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