

# Earnestly Contending for the Faith...

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## MISSION STATEMENT SERIES—PART TWO

Pursuing Godliness *by G.W. Fisher, Sr.*

The name Pierpont Bishop is not a household one. His parents hailed from Connecticut and Pennsylvania, and were quite poor. They eventually settled in Virginia where Mr. Bishop was born in 1803. His parents were too poor to see to any higher education, but a benevolent society, dedicated to helping young ministerial candidates, took up his cause and saw to it that he was properly trained for the pastorate in the Presbyterian Church.

The young minister served several congregations during his short lifetime; he died of pneumonia at age 56. Among his close friends could be counted some of the outstanding theologians of his day. However, Rev. Bishop was more the “pastor” than the “theologian,” accomplishing a great deal in the congregations where he served. He married Miss Adeline McKnight and the Lord gave them four children. The first, a son, did not survive his first day in the world. The next two, both daughters, died before their first birthdays, but their last child, Samuel, lived to follow in his father’s footsteps in the ministry. These trials went a long way to help forge Pierpont’s pastor’s heart.

Rev. Bishop was not a national figure, like some of his friends. He did not leave a collection of sermons to be read and quoted from. He was just a faithful minister of the Gospel. But when B. M. Palmer, one of the best known ministers of his time, wrote a biography of his friend, James Henley Thornwell, one of the most accomplished and renowned theologians of the 1800s, he mentioned that one of Thornwell’s closest and most influential friends and most affectionate brothers in the Lord was Rev. Pierpont Bishop. Palmer says that James H. Thornwell...

*...was greatly profited by his (close friendship) with Rev. Pierpont E. Bishop, one of his co-presbyters; a man not comparable with himself either in learning or genius, but of excellent mind and of profound piety. He was one of the few, in any generation, of whom it can be said with emphasis, that they ‘walk with God.’ His holiness was rooted in principle; it pervaded his character, and was of that earnest and controlling type which the Calvinistic view of Divine truth imparts, when fully received into the heart. This was precisely the bond which linked Thornwell to him; and the affection subsisting between the two, throughout life,*



was formed in Christ, their common Lord. 'As iron sharpeneth iron, a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend;' and the sweet savour of Mr. Bishop's piety penetrated into the life and history of his brother in the gospel. BENJAMIN M. PALMER

The well-known Thornwell wrote Mrs. Bishop at the time of her husband's home going saying,

*I need not say to you how deeply I sympathize with you in your bereavement. You have reason to weep. You have lost one who has left few equals on earth. He was a man of God; a while his body freely mingled among the sons of men. He was Ghost, full of zeal in his Master's cause, and full of charity to* THORNWELL

Such men and women have walked among us in the past and quite frankly, seldom are to be found among the famous or the except that of a godly testimony, and there is more of heaven about celebrated contemporaries. They are men and women—Christians—who

This second article in our introduction to the proposed vision aspect of our passion as a body of believers—which is the *pursuit*

The opening paragraph of the vision statement as originally penned

*The chief passion of the Bible Presbyterian Church, as a body of warm-hearted Calvinists, is to **Behold God, Pursue godliness, and Proclaim Christ to the entire world.***

In our previous issue we addressed the need for God's people to have a principal passion grounded upon our chief end of glorifying God and enjoying Him forever. We also looked at what we mean by *warm-hearted Calvinism*—rejecting the notion that true Calvinism produces a cold, anti-evangelistic orthodoxy that lacks a loving spirit.

We then began to develop more carefully the threefold nature of our stated passion by speaking to what is intended when we state that part of our chief desire is to *behold God*. In these first three messages we are offering an introduction to each of the topics and in this issue we are to take up what we mean when we say that part of our chief passion is to *pursue godliness*.

Here in the Northwest we have many tall trees. They tower over the buildings and roads, reaching up towards the sky—they are soaring heavenward in order to draw all the life and energy they can from the sun. This image forms a kind of analogy—for in the pursuit of godliness there is an ardent reaching towards heaven in a prayer that we might be conformed more and more into the image of the Son of God.

## UNGODLINESS

Before we begin to more carefully delineate what it means to *pursue godliness*, we need to examine the nature of *ungodliness*. Ungodliness, says Richard Baxter, is...

*...when men are proudly great, and wise, and good, in their own eyes, and would dispose of themselves, and all their concernments, and would rule themselves, and please themselves, according to the fleshly appetite and fancy; and therefore love most the pleasures, and profits, and honors of the world, as the provision to satisfy the desires of the flesh; and God shall be no further loved, obeyed, or pleased, than the love of fleshly pleasure will give leave; nor shall have any thing but what the flesh can spare.* RICHARD BAXTER

Baxter's definition is profound and worthy of further study at another time, but simply stated, ungodliness is the *setting up of carnal-self in the stead of God*.

This sort of life promises, to those who are blinded by sin, all manner of success and satisfaction, and peace, and joy, but a life lived in a state of hostility toward, and rebellion against God, the sovereign Ruler of all things in heaven and earth—a life which despises His law and spurns His correction—has the hope of none of these things. Matthew Henry advises...



*man whose heart was in heaven, a man of prayer, full of the Holy his fellow men.* JAMES HENLY

some still do. They are not necessarily, popular. They often leave no legacy, them than many of their more are known for their *godliness*.

statement of 2007 deals with the next *of godliness*.

reads...

*Ungodliness is commonly punished with discontent and an insatiable covetousness, which are sins that are their own punishment.* MATTHEW HENRY

**Eccl. 1:8** The eye is not satisfied with seeing, Nor the ear filled with hearing.

*Worldly joys can no more fill the heart than a drop can fill a cistern; they may please the palate or fancy,....but cannot satisfy the soul.* THOMAS WATSON

Despite the evident truth of this observation, there are men and women who pursue, with all their might and man, a life of ungodliness. Conscience revolts against it at first, but with time conscience becomes so seared and so weary as to only respond weakly, if it responds at all.

*...the man (who defies God and conscience) goes deeper in debt; wrath is heaping up; sin taking root; custom fastens him; temptations to sin multiply; conscience grows seared; the heart hardened; the devil rules; Christ is shut out; the Spirit is resisted; God is daily dishonored; his law violated; he is robbed of that service which he should have...* RICHARD BAXTER

This spiraling degeneration, if it is not checked by the grace of God, leads to utter ruin. *It is not falling into water that drowns, but lying in it. It is not falling into sin that damns, but lying in it without repentance .... Men have silenced their consciences, and God has seared them. And now he lets them sin and does not punish. A sear in the conscience is a brand-mark of reprobation.* THOMAS WATSON

Obviously then, no true believer can be content with an ungodly life. It runs contrary to his or her *new nature* in Christ Jesus. The Scripture does tell us that we can grieve the Holy Spirit, but His very purpose in us, as believers, is to drive us on to godliness.

## THE PURSUIT OF GODLINESS

In a section of his first letter to Timothy, the Apostle Paul deals with what he describes as a coming great apostasy:

**1 Tim 4:1-5** Now Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

Paul goes on then to charge Timothy directly, saying,

**1 Tim 4:6-11** If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed. But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. For

to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe. These things command and teach.

In the heart of this admonition, Paul speaks of the *pursuit of godliness*...

“But reject profane and old wives’ fables, and *exercise yourself toward godliness*. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.”

Here the Apostle uses the phrase, *exercise yourself toward godliness* to express what we are calling the *pursuit of godliness*.

To pursue something is defined as *to go after it or to go on the hunt* for it. Since it is seldom necessary any longer for any of us to survive by our hunting skills, some of the poignancy has been lost here. Generally speaking, we hunt for entertainment, not survival; and therefore the whole element of urgency and necessity is lost. But when Paul commands Timothy to *exercise* himself toward godliness, he is implying that he should jettison anything that might encumber or hinder his efforts in the matter—suggesting that it is both urgent and necessary.

Now, it is right at this very point that the matter turns for many—that is, each one needs to examine his or her heart and determine if there exists there any real sense of necessity or urgency in regard to his or her own godliness. The answer to this question runs right to the core and heart of who and what we are as believers, as Christians, as the adopted sons and daughters of God in Jesus Christ.

Where this sense of necessity and urgency is missing, one of two things is wrong: either faith and hope in Jesus Christ have burned very low, or they were never ignited to begin with. The first possibility is serious, the second is critical.

If we ask, “On what grounds may we find a reason for the necessity and urgency of practicing godliness?” the answer is quite plain...

Lev 19:1-2 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: 'You shall be holy , for I the LORD your God am holy.

1 Peter 1:13-16 ...gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; 15 but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy , for I am holy."

John Owen says...

...it is needless to produce instances of God's commands that we should be holy; it is the concurrent voice of the law and gospel. Our apostle sums up the whole matter,

1 Thess 4:1-3 We exhort you, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what

commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification,

*...or holiness; whereunto he adds one especial instance. This is that which the commandments of Christ require, yea, this is the sum of the whole commanding will of God. The substance of the law is, "Be ye holy; for I the LORD your God am holy.* JOHN OWEN

Now, we want to make a clear distinction here between the *holiness* imputed to us by faith in Jesus Christ, and the practice of *holiness* that becomes us as believers.

Simply expressed, it becomes those whom Jesus made holy by His death on the cross, to be holy in the life they now live by Him.

2 Peter 1:3-4 *...His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*

Think of the endless number of emblems men and women wear everyday to show something about themselves—something about their tastes or preferences in sports or fashion, or their citizenship or their favorite places to travel. The chief emblem that those who have been granted holiness in Jesus Christ can wear is holiness of life. What we are talking about here is not an attempt to make ourselves holy in the eyes of God and man, but the pursuit of exhibiting that holiness to which we have been called by our redemption.

Is it appropriate that the world should know that I am a Seahawks fan, but be utterly ignorant of the fact that I am a blood-bought Christian? The one is, for all eternal purposes, insignificant.

*Make this maxim your own, that godliness is the purpose of your creation. God never sent men into the world only to eat and drink and put on fine clothes, but that they might 'serve him in holiness and righteousness' (Luke 1:74,75). God made the world only as a dressing room to dress our souls in. He sent us here on the grand errand of godliness.* THOMAS WATSON

So then, what is it that Paul commands Timothy to exercise himself in? It is godliness, the Christian's emblem, or as the Puritans would say, *piety*.

In his book entitled, *The Practice of Piety: Directing A Christian How to Walk That He may Please God*, Lewis Bayley states that the practice of piety consists in three basic things:

- 1) Knowing the *essence of God*: that is, being familiar with Him and His attributes;
- 2) Knowing *yourself*, both in regards to your natural state and your new life as the redeemed of the Lord; and
- 3) Knowing what it is to *glorify God rightly*: that is, in both your life and your death.

*...there can be no true piety without the knowledge of God; nor any good practice without the knowledge of a man's own self.* LEWIS BAYLEY

Now, needless to say, there is a series of messages in every one of these points, but because we are merely introducing the subject, we will limit our comments accordingly.

The more biblically accurate our understanding of who God really is—that is, not what we imagine Him to be, or worse yet, what we wish Him to be, but what He has truly and infallibly revealed Himself to be in His Word—the more solid and sincere our practice of godliness will be. And this is so for many reasons, but for now, let it be said that as reverence and esteem grow, love grows too: and wherever love is found, emulation blossoms.

**'Godliness is Godlikeness.' What a rare thing godliness is! It is not airy and puffed up, but solid, and such as will take up the heart and spirits. Godliness consists in an exact harmony between holy principles and practices.** THOMAS WATSON

It is also true, that the more realistic our view of ourselves is—that is, both what we would be without Christ and what we are by Him—the more profound the nature of godliness will be.

The more clearly we see our depravity by nature and where it could and would carry us if it were left unchecked, and the more clearly we see the advantages and blessings of godliness, the more passionate we will be in our pursuit of that which we have been called to by grace.

**...godliness is not only the naked principles of religion, but likewise the Christian affection, the inward bent of the soul, suitable to divine principles. There must be a godly disposition, carrying us to godly truths.** RICHARD SIBBES

We live in a day when a large segment of the Church of Jesus Christ has taken it upon itself to determine wherein the glorifying of God consists. It does this because to a great extent it is, in their opinion, *all about them*.

Both the Westminster and Heidelberg catechisms begin by directing the hearts of men away from that idea. The Westminster catechism we have already referred to; the Heidelberg catechism begins by saying,



**Question 1: What is your only comfort in life and in death?**

**Answer 1: That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who with His precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and redeemed me from all the power of the devil....**

Godliness is epitomized in the desire to discover, to pursue, to hunt out that life which most pleases and honors the One who redeemed me from sin and death.

Now, tragically, some hear of *godliness* and their minds immediately conjure up a picture of dour, somber, cheerless pilgrims trudging down a bleak path towards heaven—enjoying nothing.

Abraham was called the *friend of God*—does that description depict his life? No, in Abraham we see a man of faith striking out into the unknown, worshiping God in the face of a pagan world and prospering—and all to the glory of God.

David is described by the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit, as *a man after God's own heart*—does that description fit him? No, here is a man who loved music, enjoyed the creation, and prospered—and all to the glory of God.

You find, reader, not the godly bowed down and depressed by their godliness, walking in the shadows under a cloud—you find there the ungodly. They are the ones you see slinking about, depressed in body and spirit, living a lie and waking to find themselves stinging in conscience, slaves to sin and plagued with regret.

The only time you see Abraham and David so is when they let down the pursuit of godliness and gave way to their baser nature. But when they were in their right minds spiritually, when they were hunting godliness, their faces were bright and they lived life openly and joyfully.

And what of the Savior? He had no love of sin and nothing in this world, but no one can imagine a dark and depressed figure when they think of Him.

What may be lawfully enjoyed is ours by the grace of God and under the authority of God. This is such a grand thing, so full of implications, that we cannot take it up here and now. But just briefly, the more we know of God the more we understand the nature of sin, its corrupting power and final end. At the same time, we also come to know what God means when He tells us that He is the One...

## 1 Tim 6:17 ...who gives us richly all things to enjoy .

*The people of God are plentifully provided for. Your tables are well furnished, backs well clothed; it is God which gives you richly to enjoy them, and he must be acknowledged. We should say of every morsel of bread, This is God's gift to me; of every night's sleep, This is the Lord's goodness. When God is acknowledged in these outward things, he takes it the more kindly, and we are the better for it; the mercy is the sweeter and the more sanctified.* THOMAS MANTON

We must bring this introduction to a close and I would do so by making three observations concerning godliness—which hopefully make its pursuit desirable to every Christian.

## Godliness is PROFITABLE

### 1 Tim 4:8 For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

*That is, he who has godliness wants nothing, though he has not those little aids; for godliness alone is able to conduct a man to complete perfection. It is the beginning, the middle, and the end, of Christian life; and, therefore, where that is entire, nothing is imperfect.* JOHN CALVIN

## Godliness is APPROPRIATE

2 Peter 3:10-12 ...the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?

*The consideration of this dissolution of the creatures should make those of the Lord's people that are furthest promoted in holiness very inquisitive after, and still aspiring toward, a further degree of holiness than what they have*

*formerly attained; knowing that the greater degree of holiness they attain to, the more comfort shall they have now and the more glory when Christ comes.* ALEXANDER NESBIT

## Godliness GLORIFIES our God

*Make this maxim your own, that godliness is the purpose of your creation. God never sent men into the world only to eat and drink and put on fine clothes, but that they might 'serve him in holiness and righteousness' (Luke 1:74,75). God made the world only as a dressing room to dress our souls in. He sent us here on the grand errand of godliness.*

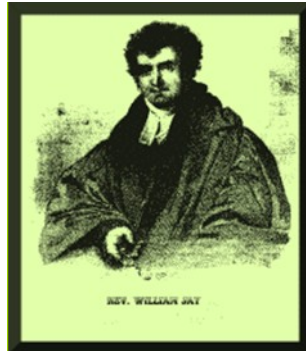
THOMAS WATSON

It seems that our appointed purpose is all too often obscured by worldliness. I pray that the Spirit of God will use His Word to press heavily upon our hearts the desire to pursue godliness with a sense of joy and expectation.

## What Is Justification?

By William Jay

What is justification? It is not it with sanctification; and some **condemnation**. It is the and pronouncing him righteous. offence, but by the non—by the Apostle: We are justified whom God hath set forth as a justified from all things." It is no more." It is also a present they **have**, passed from death



the making us righteous in person, but in state. The Papists confound Protestants do the same. But justification stands opposed to absolving a man from a charge; the acquitting him when accused; Only as **we** are really guilty—**we** cannot be justified by disproving the imputation of it, and treating us as innocent. The manner is described freely by his grace, through the redemption that **is** in Christ Jesus, propitiation for sin. The blessing is full and complete: for we, "are permanent and irreversible: "Their sins and iniquities will I remember benefit. The perception of it may be wanting"; but the state is real: unto life: they **are** accepted in the Beloved. And blessed, says David, is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered: blessed in his duties; blessed in his comforts. Blessed in his trials. For him affliction has no curse, death, no sting, eternity, no terror.

This inestimable blessing is obtained by the faith of Christ. We are often curious, and ask for reasons, when we should be satisfied with facts. It is not necessary to be able to explain precisely how faith justifies the soul. It should be enough for us to know that it is a truth clearly revealed.

And since, O my soul, none are justified that do not believe; and all that believe are justified; let me apply my heart unto wisdom. Instead of losing myself in subtle inquiries and angry disputes, let me do two things—Let me observe, first, the importance of this faith. It is, in a sober sense, as important as Christ. What, therefore, is ascribed to him meritoriously, is ascribed to faith instrumentally. He is the well; but by faith we draw water out of it. He is the refuge; but a refuge cannot screen us, unless it be entered. He is the bread of life; but food cannot nourish us, unless it be eaten—and all this is done by faith **only**.

Let me, secondly, ask, seriously and earnestly, have I this faith of Christ? Do I believe the record that God hath given us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son. And am I repairing to him; and trusting in him alone for salvation? How does my faith sow? Does it "sow in tears?" How does it rejoice? Does it "rejoice in Christ Jesus?" and has it "no confidence in the flesh?" How does it work? Does it "work by love?" How does it travel? How plead? Can I say, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of his righteousness only?"



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