

Church of God, The Eternal

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Godliness vs. Ungodliness

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Dear Brethren:

It is common for people to divide themselves conceptually into two beings—on one side the spiritual self and on the other side the physical (or real) self. This phenomenon is most apparent when someone is seen to transition from wearing his "religious" mask to being his "normal" self. We are not just talking about premeditated hypocrisy, when someone is intentionally trying to make himself appear to be something he is not. While such intent to deceive is certainly included in the phenomenon, the concept goes much deeper.

There are many who claim to have a spiritual—religious—orientation as their foundation for life, and they are very sincere in their intentions. They are sincere in that they really do attach themselves to specific ideas about God, man, and their hope of an afterlife. If you ask them what they believe about the spirit world, they will become thoughtful and reflective, enunciating their private views about invisible things, whether that be a belief in reincarnation, going to heaven or hell, floating in a state of limbo, or any of the myriad other conceptions common to human beings. They are serious about these things. They honestly hold them to be true.

Yet, as you witness the behavior of these same people day to day, it is apparent that their concepts about spiritual things do not really play a part in the choices they make in life. And most people do not at all recognize this disconnect in their own behaviors. But it is often evident to others when something occurs to jolt a friend or acquaintance from his "real self" into his "spiritual self," or vice versa. When spiritual things come up in conversation, it is as if a light switch is tripped, and that individual consciously puts the "normal self" on hold for a moment to change gears and put on his "spiritual" hat. Now he will wax eloquent

about spiritual things, until it is time to get back to the real world, and then "click," back comes the "normal self" again. Most of us have probably witnessed this kind of behavior but maybe never really processed it consciously to identify the phenomenon. What we are really talking about is the simple principle God calls godliness vs. ungodliness.

Who Are the Ungodly?

God heaps much criticism upon human beings whom He calls "ungodly."

An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is as a burning fire (Proverbs 16:27).

For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon *the world of the ungodly*; And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto *those that after should live ungodly*; And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;) The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished (2 Peter 2:4–9) [emphasis mine].

Too often we may read the Bible without recognizing to whom God is actually speaking, especially relating to those passages condemning the wicked and ungodly. We think to ourselves how glad we are we do not fall into that category. We acknowledge we have our own personal faults and failings, but we reason that these "wicked and ungodly" of whom God is speaking are much worse than we.

Yet, from years ago in God's true church we learned that the ungodly includes anyone that does not take God into consideration in his personal decisions. That leaves less room for us to excuse ourselves from God's condemnation. If the ungodly are not just a subset of most vile and despicable beings on earth (as man views it), but anyone who does not take God into consideration in personal decisions, that sweeps much more of us into the net.

Therefore, when we are speaking of people who talk about spiritual things—claiming to have regard for God—but never permit that spiritual orientation to affect day-to-day life, we are speaking precisely of the condition God calls ungodliness. It is not, therefore, an accusation or diatribe to be called ungodly, but a simple acknowledgment of our true state.

Any of us might be considered "pretty good" in this world, as long as we do not murder, steal, or grossly insult our fellow man. But many people only adhere to these protocols because it is considered decent behavior among family, friends, and acquaintances, not because they recognize it as a spiritual obligation under the laws of God. This means the man who avoids murder only because of his fear of civil authorities and his worry about loss of public affirmation, is still considered ungodly by God, even while "keeping" the law. So, too, the man who gives great sums to worldly charities because he is seeking to build a legacy for himself and his family name, is likewise considered ungodly in spite of his "good works." His acts are not done in recognition of the authority of God and His immutable laws, but are rather a means to a selfish end. He is not acting out of a preeminent desire to please God. Therefore his acts are ungodly, whether compliant or noncompliant with the law.

Furthermore, there are some people in the world (fewer all the time) who are very religious, and do make decisions based upon their concepts of godly principles. These are not like the majority whom we have described already, who check their religion at the door when it comes to making personal decisions in life. But are these zealous religionists considered godly by the Creator? They may be very sincere in doing what they think is right, and if they use the Bible for their source of instruction, they may even live more moral lives than most. But without yet being called to know the true God, they can still never be godly—not as God defines it. The only ones who have an opportunity to be godly are those who have been called out of the false religions of this world, including false Christianity.

No matter how much human beings may wax eloquent about moral standards of behavior within society, absent an acknowledgment of the authority of the one and only Creator God who rules over them, they are considered ungodly.

And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him. These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage (Jude 14–16).

The day is coming when humanity—who has never taken the real God into consideration—will be humbled and brought to that recognition. They will be taught that the basis of all right behavior is grounded in conscious obedience to Almighty God.

Who Are the Godly?

Who, then, are the godly, in contrast to the ungodly? They are the ones who orient their lives around God's commandments, and use God's counsel to make decisions in life. They care what God thinks, and they are concerned most about doing that which is right in His eyes.

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish (Psalm 1:1–6).

How does God distinguish the godly from the ungodly? Of the one, "his delight is in the law of the Lord." But of the other He says, "the ungodly are not so," so they must *not* delight in the law of the Lord. They may profess and even adhere to certain principles that are founded upon God's law, but that is not why they are doing it. And anyone who is not seeking God—using the revealed law of God as a compass by which to navigate in life—will certainly become guilty of many sins.

A key ingredient in the mind of a godly person is a healthy fear of God.

And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, To keep the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good? . . . Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name (Deuteronomy 10:12–13, 20).

One who has a healthy fear of God believes He is real, and knows His law provides real blessings for obedience and real curses for disobedience. This godly individual does not consider Him just some philosophical being for eclectic discussion, but a real-to-life ruling Sovereign in the universe.

One of the manifestations of this legitimate fear of God is found in obedience to His command to appear before Him at the Feast of Tabernacles.

And thou shalt eat before the LORD thy God, in the place which he shall choose to place his name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; *that thou mayest learn to fear the LORD thy God always* (Deuteronomy 14:23) [emphasis mine].

In essence, this is one of those test commands, much like the weekly Sabbath. Those who make concerted effort and provision during the year to save second tithe and make arrangements for travel, are showing God that He comes first. It is a godly orientation. Those who do not, and without acceptable excuse are not in one of those designated places at the appointed time, have proved to God He does not really come first. The one who obeys God when it is convenient is not godly. Oh yes, sometimes God's laws might be "convenient enough" to obey, so we might do so, but that is not sufficient. The godly individual makes God first in priority, not second or third on the list. The godly individual is not a fair-weather keeper of Sabbaths and Holy Days.

Faith and Godliness

A true fear of God begets faith in the life of the godly individual. Faith is the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1). Although invisible, God is so real to him, that he makes decisions based upon that reality. Other human beings think such criteria is foolish and absurd. While they may talk about their belief in God, He is not so real that they will actually allow His presence to affect their decision-making. The wise of this world make decisions based upon what they can see and confirm tangibly. This is bound up in their *scientific principle* for confirming "truth." So anyone who makes decisions based upon the invisible is considered foolish—one to be pitied for his superstition and backward thinking. But it is impossible to be godly without accepting as true the existence of the invisible God.

Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD (Jeremiah 23:23–24).

To the godly, by faith God is always at hand. To the ungodly, by lack of faith He is always some theoretical being far off. The godly prove their godliness when things are at their worst. It is one thing to speak of spiritual things and profess belief when things are easy. It is quite another to act upon that belief when it appears, physically, only doom will result. This principle was beautifully expressed by King David:

A Psalm of David. The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me (Psalm 23:1–4).

The ungodly will never let God lead them through "the valley of the shadow of death," let alone do so with confidence. They demand to take their own path, and avoid anything that appears to threaten their physical well-being. But the godly do not panic in times of crisis and bail out to save the self. Though faced with clear and present danger, God is still uppermost in their minds, and they stand firm in obedience, waiting confidently for deliverance. Even if God delays in His intervention, the godly never give in to doubt and accuse God of unfaithfulness. As Job stated in the midst of his trial, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways [the ways of obedience] before him" (Job 13:15).

Ungodly of Israel Face Danger

As we have already seen, the world is full of people who are ungodly. Many of them never take God into consideration in what they do at all. Others might make a pretense of caring about spiritual things, but prove by their actions that they really do not. Still fewer of those in the world, being truly zealous—though having not been called to a knowledge of the true God—are yet prevented from becoming godly.

It is only those few called out of this world and given that opportunity to know the one and only Creator God (through no worth of their own) that have the chance to become godly. It is also only those called ones—spiritual Israelites—whom God is holding accountable if we do not put on that true godliness.

And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the LORD thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven. But the LORD hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance, as ye are this day (Deuteronomy 4:19–20).

Yes, God allows the deceived nations of the world to worship their false gods because they cannot know any better. Their ungodliness is unavoidable until called. But Israel has been taught a different way, and they are therefore accountable.

For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator (1 Peter 4:17–19).

Those spiritual Israelites who refuse to hold fast to God's revelation of the true gospel will be counted among the ungodly who have no excuse. It is one thing to be ungodly because you are deceived and without the revelation of God. It is quite another to receive that revelation and then still become counted among the ungodly.

But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. . . . But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy [conduct] and godliness (2 Peter 3:7, 10–11).

That apostasy—departure from truth—was prophesied for the last-day church, and is still manifesting its effects, as members of the Body of Christ in this age have continued to reject the foundation of their calling in favor of the ungodliness of this world:

For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, *ungodly men*, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage. But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own *ungodly lusts*. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit (Jude 4, 16–19) [emphasis mine].

While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness,

than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire (2 Peter 2:19–22).

It behooves us to take these warnings from God very seriously. Are we continuing to fight to resist that spirit of apostasy in our own lives, or are we allowing compromise of God's truth to enter in?

Godliness is not really manifested when times are easy as much as when times are hard. Whether we are considered godly children depends upon the choices we make when we are threatened, either physically or spiritually. Those who know the truth but do not have the gumption to act upon it in difficult circumstances, are proving their religion is vain.

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world (James 1:22–27).

If we are not only understanding and agreeing with God's revealed laws but are also holding fast and *practicing* those laws—even when it requires much faith to step out and subjugate our carnal fears—then we can be counted among the godly. It is this kind of fruit that God requires of those who will be part of that first resurrection and share rulership of this earth under Jesus Christ when He returns.

Yours with love and affection in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned centrally below the typed name.

Jon W. Brisby