

Podcast: Godliness

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[0 : 00] Hello, hello, hello. Welcome to the Providence Podcast. My name is Chris Oswald, Senior Pastor at Providence Community Church. So glad that you're with us today. I want to shout out to that small number of people who are listening to this podcast now on a semi-regular basis that aren't members of Providence Community Church but are scattered throughout the Fruited Plain.

Hello to y'all. So thankful that you're listening. This podcast is going to deal with a little bit of the unpacking of our discussion of godliness that occurred last Sunday, preaching from the end of 1 Timothy chapter 3. So we're going to talk about godliness today, and this is sort of to set up our community groups that we'll be meeting this week. Our community groups meet twice a month, and they gather to discuss the sermon in a loose sense, themes in the sermon, texts that were used in the sermon, and so on and so forth, and gather together to care for each other and to stir one another up to faith and good deeds. And so we're going to talk about godliness today. And what I want to talk about in particular is the imitative aspect of godliness. Godliness is imitation, fundamentally. Godliness is imitation. And that means that the object, it must be in clear view. The thing you're imitating must be in clear view. It must be accurate, and it must be, you know, in clear view. Let me give you an example of where imitation can go wrong. So godliness, let's use another term similar, that is manliness.

So manliness would be the imitation of what I would say is something like the ideal archetype of a man. So in order to aspire to manliness, you have to have some sense of the ideal archetype of what a man is.

And, you know, I've done maybe more than most suburban pastors have in terms of time in urban context, time in minority communities, and so on and so forth. And this problem of the imitative necessity associated with manliness really comes into play here. So what I mean is, is that if a young boy who has sort of a built-in desire to imitate manliness, if he looks around and he sees men who are not good men, but that's what he has, that's the ideal archetype of manliness in his particular culture and context, and he goes to, you know, imitate what he sees, well, we've got a problem because what he's looking at isn't a good man. He's imitating a bad man. He doesn't know that he's just trying to engage in manliness, which is an imitative process dependent on an object and seeing that object and so forth. So if your object is off, then what you're going to get, even in the sincerest of imitation, is going to be off as well. And, you know, I don't love the phrase toxic masculinity because mostly because it always seems to lead in, it only seems to be one-sided. The toxic masculinity always seems to be on the hard side and no one ever talks about toxic masculinity on the bookish side, on the soft side and so on and so forth. But there's all forms of, there's all sorts of forms of toxic masculinity. And what's really going on there is, is that people have identified an ideal archetype of man, of manliness, and then aspired to be that, but they've picked the wrong man to imitate. And so you've got people like, you know, Andrew Tate, who are stepping into the void, who is a broken man. He's a broken man. And yet many men are scrambling, or many young men are scrambling looking for an example to imitate. They want to be manly, and they're like, well, where's the ideal archetype of man? They land on Andrew Tate.

[4 : 49] And so they sincerely go about imitating the wrong thing. This is probably, well, not probably, this is the central problem associated with godliness. If you don't have the right God in view, the thing you aspire to will be broken. It will be incorrect. We're going to this Sunday look at 1 Timothy chapter 4. And in 1 Timothy chapter 4, I won't ruin it all for you, but in 1 Timothy 4, we've got a sense of a situation where some people are being led astray into a form of godliness that is not godly.

But they're being led astray in that direction, which is an ascetic direction, because they've got the wrong view of God. Now, when I say the word ascetic, I feel like I have to hit pause for a minute and

define my term. I don't know if I'm right about this, but it feels like the first big word that every 20-something these days learns is aesthetic, A-S-T-H, right? Aesthetic, which means beautiful. Aesthetic means like plain, nothingness, and so on and so forth. So I'm saying that in 1 Timothy 4, some people aspire to a version of godliness that is broken because they've got the wrong view of God. They see him as a prude. And because they see him as a prude, they see him actually as a being who looks down upon the material world, who sees the material world as less than. And because of that view of God, they aspire to a form of godliness that is itself broken. And that form of godliness that's broken shows up in abstaining from foods that they shouldn't be abstaining from, and abstaining even from the joy of marriage, which they should not be abstaining from. Pardon the background noise, but I'm on a time crunch to get this podcast done, and my wife is also on a time crunch to get a few things done that she needs to get done. So we're sharing the same space, we share the same office, and so you may hear some cute little sneezes, and she's starting to come down with something, or the printer, or so on and so forth. I apologize for that, but it is what it is. So when you have the wrong view of God, you get the wrong form of godliness. And it always winds up being, in many respects, untenable. So you start with the wrong view of God, you get the wrong kind of godliness.

Now, what are some wrong views of God that can lead us to wrong pursuits, wrong definitions of godliness? This is what I want to encourage you to discuss in your community groups. I want you to talk about the number, the wrong views of God that a person can have, and how those lead to sort of a wrong kind of definition of what godliness is. And I gave you one, and that is the prudish God. The god who looks down on materiality. That vision of God will lead to an ascetic life, a life that is unnecessarily spare and bare, overly spiritualized, under-emphasizing practicality and means, and so on and so forth. So that's one way, that's one false view of God. Well, there's another one, and I think you're going to come up with a bunch if you start to think about it. But another wrong view of God would be a passive God, a passive God, who simply doesn't really care too much about what we do, and so on and so forth. And so in that respect, if that's your view of God, then godliness will have some kind of passivity, particularly probably toward holiness, a lax attitude toward holiness, or so on and so forth.

[8 : 58] So that's what we're dealing with. That's one of the main concepts we're dealing with. Now, I'd like you to discuss how it's possible, because it is, to sort of have a broken view of God that's possible. So what views of God do you have or have you had that are or were incorrect and thus inspired imitation of the wrong views and thus kind of created false godliness, I guess you could say.

So one other thing I wanted to add to that is the role of the conscience, which is something that comes up a lot in 1 Timothy, and we've attempted to discuss it to some extent. But I wanted you to think about how the conscience is not a truth-finding device as much as it is just sort of using the data you feed it and then telling you whether or not you're aligned with what that data is. For instance, if you have the wrong view of God and that wrong view is compelling and like you really believe that this is who God is, your conscience is going to convict you when you fail to conform to what is actually an incorrect view of God. This is one of the things that I think the Bible means when it talks about an evil conscience or even a weak conscience. The conscience is simply reflecting on the view of God that you have. It isn't necessarily going to help you have a correct view of God. You have to get your correct view of God from the Word of God and then let your conscience interact with the correct view of God. Now, I have something I want to play for you and it's 15 minutes long and you're going to have to get the kids out of the room because it's from Huckleberry Finn and the N-word is I'm pretty sure featured in this clip. A number of years ago, Bill Murray, yes, Bill Murray, the comedian, did an album called New Worlds and what he was doing was he actually was reading from famous pieces of literature with music accompanying him with a symphony accompanying him. And there is a compelling moment in Huckleberry Finn that he also sees. I've read this in the past and thought, oh my goodness, what a thing Sam Clemens has written here. What a thing Mark Twain has written here. And you can tell that Bill Murray locked in on this as well.

I want you to listen to this because what you've got here is Huck Finn, the character, having a wrong view of God and his conscience is interacting with a wrong view of God. Okay, so let me see if I can play this for you.

I've got this all set up, I think, to work. Let me try. Bye-bye. Thank you.

[12:57] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[15:13] Thank you. Thank you. that? No way. That was where it pinched. Conscience says to me, what had poor Miss Watson done to you that you could see her nigger go off right under your eyes and never say one single word?

What did that poor old woman do to you that you could treat her so mean? Why, she tried to learn you your book. She tried to learn you your manners. She tried to be good to you every way she know how.

That's what she done. I got to feeling so mean and so miserable. I most wished I was dead. I fidgeted up and down the raft, abusing myself to myself. And Jim was fidgeting up and down past me.

We neither of us could keep still. Every time he danced around and said, that's K-Row. It went through me like a shot. And I thought if it was K-Row, I reckoned I would die of miserableness. Jim talked out loud all the time while I was talking to myself.

He was saying how the first thing he would do when he got to a free state, he would go to saving up money and never spend a single cent. And when he got enough, he would buy his wife, which was owned on a farm close to where Miss Watson lived. And then they would both work to buy the two children. And if their master wouldn't sell them, they'd get an abolitionist to go and steal them.

[16:54] It most froze me to hear such talk. He wouldn't ever dare to talk such talk in his life before. Just see what a difference it made in him. The minute he judged, he was about free.

It was according to the old saying, give a nigger an inch and he'll take an L. Thinks I, this is what comes of my not thinking. Here was this nigger, which I had as good as help to run away, coming right out flat-footed and saying he would steal his children. Children that belonged to a man I didn't even know, a man that hadn't ever done me no harm. I was sorry to hear Jim say that.

It was such a lowering of him. My conscience got to stirring me up hotter than ever until at last I said to him. Let up on me. It ain't too late yet. I'll paddle ashore at the first light and tell.

I felt easy and happy and light as a feather right off. All my troubles was gone. I went to looking out sharp for a light and sort of singing to myself.

By and by, one showed. Jim sings out. We safe up. We safe. Jump up and crack your heels. That's the good old K-Roy at last. I just knows it.

[18:20] I says, I'll take the canoe and go see Jim. It mightn't be, you know. He jumped up and got the canoe ready and put his old coat in the bottom for me to set on and give me the paddle. And as I shoved off, he says, we would assume I'd be a shouting for joy. And I say, it's all on account of a hook. I was a free man.

And I could never have been free if it hadn't been for Huck. Huck done it. Jim won't ever forget you, Huck. You're the best friend Jim's ever had. And you're the only friend old Jim's gotten out.

I was paddling off all in a sweat to tell him. But when he says this, it seemed to kind of take the tuck all out of me. I went along slow and and I weren't right down certain whether I was glad I started or whether I weren't.

When I was 50 yards off, Jim says, there you goes. The old true Huck. The only white gentleman that ever kept his promise to old Jim. Well, I just felt sick. But I says, I got to do it. I can't get out of it. I said, right then, along comes a skiff with two men in it with guns and they stopped. And I stopped. One of them says, what's that yonder? A piece of a raft, I says. Do you belong on it?

[20:03] Yes, sir. Any man on it? Only one, sir? Well, there's five niggers run off tonight up yonder.

Above the head of the band is your man white or black. I didn't answer a prompt. I tried to, but the words wouldn't come. I tried for a second or two to brace up and out with it, but I weren't man enough.

Having the spunk of a rabbit. I see I was weakening. So, I just give up trying and up and says, he's white. I reckon we'll go and see for ourselves.

Well, I wish you would, says I. Because it's Pap that's there and maybe you'd help me tow the raft to shore where the light is. He's sick and so is ma'am and Marianne. Oh, the devil. We're in a hurry, boy, but I suppose we've got to. Come, buckle to your paddle and let's get along. I buckled to my

paddle and they laid to their oars. When we had made a stroke or two, I says, Pap will be mighty, much obliged to you, I can tell you. Everybody goes away when I want them to help me tow the raft to shore and I can't do it by myself. Well, that's infernal me. I'd too say, boy, what's the matter with your father?

It's the, ah, the, well, it ain't anything much. They stopped pulling. It weren't but a mighty waste to the raft now. One says, boy, that's a lie. What is the matter with your Pap?

[22 : 04] Answer up square now and it'll be better for you. I will. Sir, I will, honest, but don't leave us, please. It's the, the, gentlemen, if you only pull ahead and let me heave you the headline, you won't have to come near the raft. Please do. Better back, John, set her back, says one.

They back water. Keep away, boy. Keep delivered. Confound it. I just expect the wind has blowed it to us. Your Pap's got the smallpox and you know it precious well. Why didn't you come out and say so?

You want to spread it all over? Well, says I, a blubbered. I, I've told everybody before and then they just went away and left.

Poor dad was there. Something in that. We are right down sorry for you, but we, well, hang it. We don't want the smallpox. You see, look here. I tell you what to do.

Don't you try to land by yourself or you'll smash everything to pieces. You float along down about 20 miles and you'll come to a town on the left-hand side of the river. It will be long after sun up then and when you ask for help, you tell them your folks are all down with chills and fever. Don't be a fool again and let people guess what is the matter. Now, we're trying to do your kindness. So you just put 20 miles between us. That's a good boy. I wouldn't do anything to land yonder where the light is. It's only a wood you say. I reckon your father's poor and I'm bound to say he's in pretty hard luck. Here, I put a \$20 gold piece on this board and you get it when it floats by. I feel, might I mean to leave you, but my kingdom, it won't do to fool with smallpox, don't you see?

[24 : 04] Hold on, Parker, says the other man. Here's a \$20 to put on the board for me. Good boy, you do as Mr. Parker tells you and you'll be all right. That's so my boy. Goodbye.

Goodbye. If you see any runaway niggers, you get help and nab them and you can make some money by it. Goodbye, sir, says I. I won't let no runaway niggers get by me if I can help.

They went off and I got aboard the raft feeling bad and low because I know very well I had done wrong. And I see it weren't no use for me to try to learn to do right. A body that don't get started right when he's little, ain't got no show. When the pinch comes, there ain't nothing to back him up and keep him to his work.

And so he gets beat. Then I thought a minute and says to myself, hold on. Suppose you'd have done right and give Jim up. Would you feel better than what you do now?

No, says I'd feel bad. I'd feel just the same way I do now. Well then, says I, what's the use? You learn it to do right when it's troublesome to do right.

[25 : 28] And ain't no trouble to do wrong. And the wages, it's just the same. I was stuck. I couldn't answer that. So I reckoned I wouldn't bother to know more about it. But after this, always do whichever came handiest at the time. I went into the wigwam, Jim worked there.

I looked all around. He weren't anywhere. I says, jam. Here I ask, is they out of sight yet? Don't talk loud. He was in the river under the stern or with just his nose out. I told him they was out of sight. So he come aboard. He says, I was listening to all the talk and I slipped into the river and was going to show for sure they come aboard. Then I was going to swim to the raft again when they was gone. But lousy, oh, you did fool them, huck. That was the smartest dive. I tell you, child, I expect to save old Jim. Old Jim ain't going to forget you for that, honey. Then we talked about the money. It was a pretty good raise, \$20 a piece.

Jim said we could take deck passage on a steamboat now and the money would last us as far as we wanted to go in the free states. He said 20 mile more weren't far for the raft to go, but he wished we was already there.

So you could read that whole passage in the book and I recommend if you've never read Huckleberry Finn to do that.

I think at some point following this section, Huck Finn even says, and there I felt like the worst Christian who'd ever lived or something to that extent.

[27 : 36] I'd like you for you to discuss that in community group tomorrow. I'd like you to discuss how having the wrong ideas about God does an awful work on your conscience.

So how do we have the right ideas about God? How do we know that we see God clearly? Well, gee, if there were only someone who was the image of the invisible God, an exact imprint of his nature, friends, that's what Jesus is for. To show us what God's like. All right. Thanks so much for listening. May God bless your time and conversation tomorrow. God bless you. Have a wonderful week.