



# Introduction to Life and Godliness: Church Practices Series

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# An Introduction to Life and Godliness

## Introduction

As we begin our look at Church Practices it is useful for us to first look at how our practices should look as members of the body of Christ. We should understand that the practice of a local church body is a reflection of how each member of that body is to function in accordance with Scripture. We know that God has not given us a list of rules and regulations that is specific to each of our lives. For example, we are not told: “on Tuesday morning you must wear green socks,” “your car must not exceed 4,000 pounds,” or “you must say hello to each person you meet on 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue.” We know that God wants us as individuals and as a corporate body of believers to be fruitful and glorifying to His name. But how is this accomplished? In this lesson we will look at a basic set of guidelines that will help us live our lives properly, and also aid our local assembly to maintain practices consistent with Biblical teaching. This means, that like each individual, this body will not be exactly like every other local church. Like each individual, the local church has prescribed practices. And like each individual, the local church has varying latitude in practices while still staying within Scriptural bounds. We will be looking at several key topics in this lesson. This first topic is focused on our fruitfulness as believers. The second topic considers commandments, principles, and conscience and how they bear on how we can understand how we should live. In other words, where do we have freedom of action and where are we limited in action?

## Objectives of this Lesson

- Fruitfulness in the Christian Life
  - Understand how to be fruitful in the Christian life.
  - Understand the qualities that lead to fruitfulness.
- Commandment, Principles, and Conscience in a Believers Life
  - Understand the difference between Commandments, Principles, and Conscience.
  - Understand how to discern whether we are applying commandments, principles, or conscience when we live our lives for Christ.

## Fruitfulness in the Christian Life

As we begin to consider being fruitful in our lives for Christ we find a rich passage in 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter. Here he lays out rich instruction on leading a fruitful life. This is where we will begin this study.

NAB 2 Peter 1:1 Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ: 2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; 3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His

own glory and excellence. 4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. 5 Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in *your* moral excellence, knowledge, 6 and in *your* knowledge, self-control, and in *your* self-control, perseverance, and in *your* perseverance, godliness, 7 and in *your* godliness, brotherly kindness, and in *your* brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if these *qualities* are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these *qualities* is blind *or* short-sighted, having forgotten *his* purification from his former sins. 10 Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; 11 for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you. 12 Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you *already* know *them*, and have been established in the truth which is present with *you*. 13 I consider it right, as long as I am in this *earthly* dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, 14 knowing that the laying aside of my *earthly* dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. 15 And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you will be able to call these things to mind.

## Significance of the Section

This section is significant to our lives and needs our attention for the following reasons:

- It was given as one of the last sets of instructions at the end of Peter's earthly life.
- We are told that it should be called to our minds and should be in our thoughts no matter how long we are believers.
- This instruction will keep us from stumbling.
- This instruction will make us fruitful and useful in the true knowledge of the Lord.
- These are things we know, but of which we should be reminded.
- It deals with our lives for our Lord in a universal manner and has universal application to everything we do, regardless of the situation.

## Emphasis of the Section

### ***Grace and Peace***

2 Peter 1:2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord;

- This directly effects our life and everything we do when we have God's grace and peace multiplied in our lives. Peter shows us how we are to have this grace and peace and what our response should be in acquiring it.

### ***Extent of the Instruction***

2 Peter 1:3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness,

- Peter lets us know that everything pertaining to living in this world and being godly while doing it has been granted to believers.
- The extent that is found in this passage is to all of our life. Peter does not limit what God has granted to us to Sunday morning or to certain activities such as prayer or worship. This calls our attention to everything we do while on this earth, not just “religious” activities.

2 Peter 1:3b through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. 4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

- Peter shows us that through the true knowledge of God we understand what He has done for us and that we can understand and apply this knowledge to living our lives. His promises are known to us and through them we may become partakers of the divine nature and live accordingly.
- Nothing so clearly guides us toward living for Christ as the understanding of whom we once were and whose we now are. It is humbling, and yet at the same time the very thing that constrains us and drives us toward the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

### ***Means of Life and Godliness***

2 Peter 1:5 Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence,

- Peter now links our understanding of God and what He has done for us directly to how we should live.
- Notice that the first aspect is the application of all diligence. It is not “sit back and let it happen.” What we are to practice takes work and even more it takes diligence. This is not a one time effort or a negligent attitude. It takes work if we are to live our entire lives in a godly manner.
- Diligence - constancy, earnestness in accomplishing, careful effort, perseverance. This does not mean that if you sit down and rest you are not being diligent. Remember He has given us everything pertaining to life and godliness. Rest is part of that life. We all know it and God has told us that there is a time to rest, relax, enjoy, work, cry, laugh, mourn, etc.

2 Peter 1:10 Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; 11 for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.

- Peter does not let us forget this overarching quality of diligence. He repeats it in verse 10. He lets us know that this quality is tied to our calling and choosing by God. Its direct result is our not stumbling in our walk in this life and it is directly related to our entrance into heaven.

2 Peter 1:8 For if these *qualities* are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these *qualities* is blind *or* short-sighted, having forgotten *his* purification from his former sins.

- Peter lets us see that the qualities that we are about to look at makes us fruitful in this life for His kingdom in all aspects of living.
- He also lets us see that if we do not have these qualities we are blind, short-sighted and we have forgotten that very important remembrance of our purification from our sins.
- We can measure our practice by the diligence we apply to the qualities of our life found in verses 5-7.

### ***Qualities of Fruitfulness***

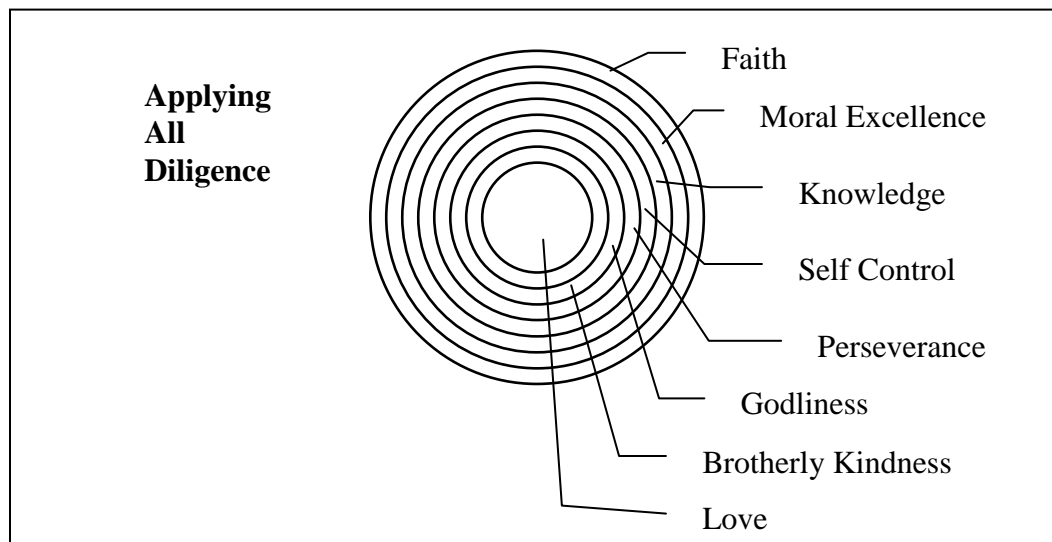
2 Peter 5 Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in *your* moral excellence, knowledge, 6 and in *your* knowledge, self-control, and in *your* self-control, perseverance, and in *your* perseverance, godliness, 7 and in *your* godliness, brotherly kindness, and in *your* brotherly kindness, love.

As we look at the qualities presented we can make some simple observations:

- These are all qualities that are spoken of throughout the Old and New Testaments.
- These are not actions, in so far as they are not acts that we must perform, e.g., prayer, worship, praise, giving, helping, etc.
- These qualities are all internal in nature and are from the inner man/woman.

We can also see some more subtle items concerning this passage:

- All these items are associated to one another by the preposition “in.” This construction in the original Greek is known as a “locative of spheres.” This construction describes the relationship between these qualities as one being within the sphere of the other. They are not linked together as a chain or as one foundation stone upon another. The diagram below shows this relationship in context to the full passage.



It is tempting to start an extensive analysis of the ordering and relationships between these qualities. It is clear that they are aligned in this manner for a purpose. However, the objective of this lesson is to recognize the qualities and that they are within each other.

- One observation that is clearly apparent is that within the sphere of one quality the growth of another one will cause the others to move also. If they don't grow the quality that expands will force the others into smaller and smaller areas. Thus they either all grow or the one that does grow compresses the others and creates an imbalance in the individual's life.
- It is also instructive to observe that love is the heart of the qualities and that faith is represented as the most outward express of these qualities.

### **Summary**

- Peter gives us a list of eight qualities and shows that they are all related to each other and our fruitfulness as believers. He does not, however, list any actions that make us fruitful.
- He calls us to practice these qualities in our entire life, not just at church.
- He echoes the same principles found in the in the rest of the New and Old Testament concerning God's matters of the heart and not just outward acts.
- Our practice must, therefore, begin with internal qualities that work their way out in our actions. This does not mean that we can do whatever we want as long as we have these qualities behind the action. The next section of this lesson will clearly show that actions are tied to attitudes.

## Commandments, Principles, and Conscience:

In this section we will look at the guidance God gives us concerning: how we can understand where He provides strict guidance, where He gives us solid principles to live by, and where He leaves us to our Spirit guided conscience in matters of practice. He never leaves us without some guidance, but often we as fallen beings try and make more or less out of what God demands of us. This section is naturally not exhaustive in nature, but will handle most of what we will come across in our daily lives and will equally address the same issues in the practice of this local body.

### **Commandments**

Our first class of guidance that God gives us is commands. We have all heard of the Ten Commandments. This is clear guidance concerning what we should or should not do. Commandments are not necessarily in the form of “Thou shall.” Often they are found in rather regular language, but still carry the same weight. We will look at Romans 14 to see how God provides us with guidance. This text will be used for all three areas we are addressing in this section. A few observations concerning commands:

- Commands are direction from authority.
- A Christian’s commands come from God. It is His authority that calls us to obey them.
- Disobedience to commands has negative consequences. God always repays.

Romans 14:1 Now accept the one who is weak in faith, *but* not for *the purpose of* passing judgment on his opinions. ...3 The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him.

- We see that Paul is giving the Romans commandments by the language he uses.
- These commandments are from God. We don’t have any option or questioning about whether it is to be obeyed or whether it is to be part of our practice.
- Commands are clear and are to be followed. There is no debate concerning these things. It is instructive to read the Bible looking for commands that don’t follow the “Thou shall or shall not” form. God commands much more than we think.
- Within the church we are given commands as to what and how we are to act and how we are to handle church affairs. These place solid boundaries as to our conduct.
- It is interesting to see in these passages that we are not to be judging opinions. The original Greek uses the words that mean “a man that is thinking within himself” or his “inward reasoning.” In other words, his opinions concerning

certain matters that are not controlled by commands or in many cases principles.

## ***Principles***

God provides us with strict guidance in many areas, but only general guidance on many other subjects. Just think how impossibly large the Bible would be if He gave us specific guidance as to how to act in every situation from the dawn of man until the end of time! This is where He has provided guidance in principles found in the Scripture. This is both a great blessing and also a point of danger for the believer. We are all prone to making commands out of principles and become legalists, or we will ignore the principles that are binding on our lives and explain them as “not applicable,” thus becoming unrestrained in our actions. But just what exactly are “principles” and how do we use them to live for God? A few observations concerning principles and their use:

- A principle is the ultimate source or origin of an action. It is the motivating idea, method, or truth that drives or controls behavior. Naturally, Biblical principles are found only in the Bible and nowhere else.
- Biblical principles are found in many forms and make up much of what we find in wisdom literature, parables, analogies, stated truths concerning God or man, and are at the heart of living with the proper attitudes before God.
- Principles are applicable to many subject areas by extension of the principle from its original subject area to other areas, but determination of a valid principle and its extension must be bounded by the following checks.
  - Use of or extension of a principle must never supercede commands and must be balanced against other principles. In other words, no matter how good a principle or extension sounds, or how logical it is, it can never violate commands. It is also necessary to ensure that principles are checked against other principles to ensure that they do not create conflict with other guidance that we are given. Extension of one principle without this checking will leave the believer chasing down a very unprofitable path and often a very destructive one. Many believers have fallen into error in practice while diligently striving for Biblical adherence. It is very easy to do.
  - The application or extension of what is thought to be a Biblical principle must be applicable for all peoples, at all times, in all cultures. We know that God’s word was given “once for all,” and thus must not be viewed in a limited sense as to time, culture, or peoples. We must be careful not to make an extension of a principle that is good only for a specific time, people, or culture. This is where we become legalists and create rules that God has not established. If the extension of what we understand to be a principle does not apply to everyone, it is not a valid extension.
  - Principles must also be relevant to their original context. A passage can have a very specific context and thus limit the extension of the principle being described. Other passages may be very general in nature and thus allow for general extension without much fear of misrepresenting the

principle. It is very easy to extend a principle taught within a context and take it far beyond what would be allowable in the context of the passage in which it was originally stated.

- Cults are the biggest abusers of principles. However, none of us are immune to the creation of invalid principles or the over-extension of principles. Much of the conflict and confusion we see in church practice throughout history and today is the misuse or misidentification of Biblical principles.
- Principles are given by God and are to be followed; however, they are not black and white commands. They require thought and understanding. The untaught, a false teacher, or a believer that does not think carefully before he or she acts on a principle easily abuses them. It is very easy to go “beyond what is written” and injure a brother or sister by creating rules out of principles.

### **Example:**

Romans 14:7 For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; 8 for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

- We can see that a principle or guiding idea or truth is seen in this passage. Paul tells the Romans that we should not think of ourselves as if we are over one another as to certain practices (in the context of this passage). We are the Lord's and are thus only subject to him.
- Check the validity of the principle
  - Does this contradict other Scriptures? No
  - Does this apply to all peoples, in all times, in all cultures? Yes
  - Is it allowed within the context of the original passage? Yes
- Can this principle be abused? Most certainly!!
  - One might think (and many have) -- “If I am only subject to Christ, then I am not subject to the elders, government authorities, husbands, etc. Thus I can live according to the rules that allow me to glorify God as I best can. If I am subject only to Christ, He will show me how to live and I will answer to Him. If I am persecuted by those that want me under their authority, I will just see this as the “persecution of the righteous” and my justification that I am doing what is godly.”
  - Does this extension pass the checks? Absolutely not!
    - It violates many commands that speak to authority.
    - If it fails the first check, then the second and third are not even considered.
- It is very easy to make a statement that sounds very godly and very glorifying to God and yet be very far off base. When dealing with principles caution is always warranted.

## **Conscience**

This subject is also very important for believers to understand. It is already apparent that God grants to us many areas of life that are guided by conscience. Since commands are clear and to be directly obeyed and principles often provide guidance, especially when dealing with attitudes in our actions, conscience is the realm that is left open to the Spirit's direction and our obedience. Some observations concerning conscience:

- Conscience is a knowledge or sense of right and wrong, a moral judgement that opposes a violation of a previously recognized Biblical principle. It is often accompanied by guilt if one's conscience is violated.
- It is something that a believer understands to be right or wrong for him/herself when there is a lack of specific direction.
- It is part of all human beings whether a believer or not (Romans 2:14-16).
- Conscience can change as a believer learns and grows. Maturity will bring a binding of conscience concerning certain areas and free believers from other areas. We are ever growing in our relationships to others, knowledge of the Word, etc. This will cause us to see and perceive things differently.
- It is not binding on another believer (Romans 14).
- It must be something that a believer is fully convinced in his or her own mind (Romans 14:5b, 22).
- Conscience is fulfilled, in action or thought, based on faith, or else it is sin (Romans 14:22-23).
- It brings happiness and contentment to those that live by faith and does not condemn him/herself in what they approve (Romans 14:22b).
- It is not a matter that binds anyone else. It is only for that individual believer (Romans 14:16-18).
- It can not violate commands, nor be in conflict with principles. It is generally the result of principles when they are given and the Spirit's guidance when no principle is given.
- It is something that we are not to judge one another concerning (Romans 14:1, 10, 13).
- It is not to be used to bring injury to another believer (Romans 14:13, 15, 19-20).
- It can be sin if not dealt with in the proper manner (Romans 14:20, 23).

Conscience is a very dangerous area for many believers because Scripture tells us to be "fully convinced" in our own minds. We often are equally convinced that what is right for us is right for everyone else. We tend to create a rule of life for ourselves and then apply it to other believers. Then we extend this rule to judgement of their lives without just cause. Though most of us would hate to admit it this is where most of us live, judge, and guide our lives. Romans 7 lives!

Our guard always must be raised high regarding the practices in our own lives, the practices of our families and fellow believers, and those of our local body. More strife

can be sown in a congregation, between believers, and within a family by the imputation of personal conscience to others than by almost any other area of a believer's life.

## Putting It Together

Working out what we have learned is a challenge that we face every day. It would be naïve to think that we will simply “waltz” out the door and not have instance challenges to many areas of our personal practice and to those of churches we have or do attend. This section is not intended as a cure-all, but may help by providing a simple thought process and picture that we can use to aid our thinking concerning commands, principles, and conscience.

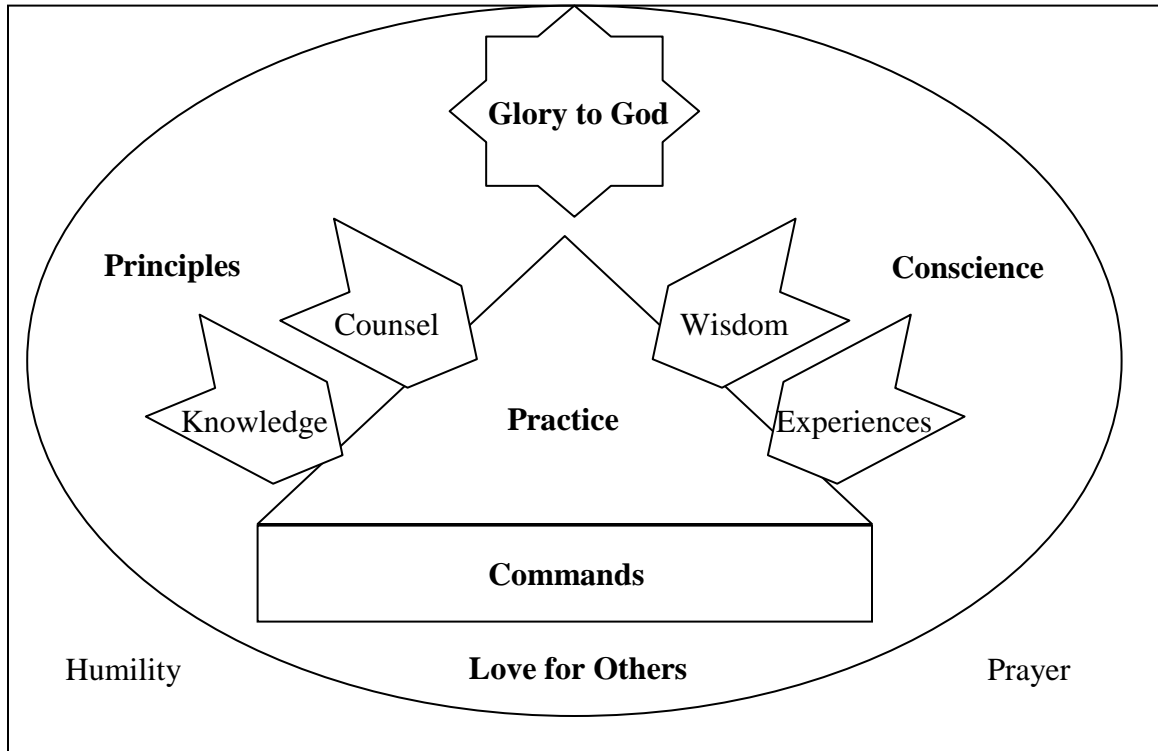
It is first very important to see that many believers can agree on principles and yet when it comes to the application or practice of the principle there can be wide disagreement. Why does this conflict arise?

Reasons for conflict:

- Poor definition of the principle by the parties in conflict.
- Lack of mutual agreement on terms used to describe the principle.
- Bad experiences involving this or similar principles.
- Different experiences with the application of a principle.
- Conflicts between this principle and other principles.
- Varied life experience or personal situation.
- Strong predisposition gained from a respected teacher or author.
- A failure to understand that the application of a principle might in reality be a matter of conscience.
- A failure to resolve the difference between internal (both personally and within the local church) and external (other believers and the world) perception of the practice.

This is a limited list of potential areas that might need to be resolved before conflict is eliminated. Remember this is not always an easy thing to come to closure on. We all come from very different backgrounds and are at different levels of understanding, maturity, and knowledge. We each react differently and assimilate information at different rates. We will go through an exercise in a few minutes that will help us see these conflict areas and how to look at these areas when dealing with conscience and principles.

Let us take a quick look at a diagram that might help us picture some relationships between what we have been studying. It can also help us remember aids in resolving conflicts that we will be looking at in the next exercise.



### ***Exercise***

Let us take a look at 1 Corinthians 10:14-33, especially vs. 23-33 (1 Corinthians 9:1-13 can be used as a cross-reference).

Use what we have learned and the preceding section to work out this passage.

- Identify the principles, commands, and areas of conscience mentioned in this passage.
- Define the principles used.
- Explain how the principles interact with conscience.
- Does the application of the principle change? If yes, identify the conditions.
- What are the areas of potential conflict or misunderstanding?
- Define the possible extensions of these principles.

## Summary

From this section we have hopefully gained an appreciation for how God is showing us how we are to live. Our practices of life are to bring glory to God in all that we do. We all want to be fruitful for God. We have seen how diligence and the increase of the qualities that Peter describes for us in 2 Peter 1 will lead us to fruitful lives. This includes all areas of our lives, not just the “religious” parts.

We have also learned that we must take care to understand what actions are dictated by commands, which ones are based on principles, and how conscience plays a part in guiding our individual lives. These are the same items that will guide the practices of this church.

In the coming sessions we will expand upon what we have learned in these lessons and begin to apply them to the practices of this church. It is also important to also apply them to our own lives so we can bring glory and honor to our Lord in every facet of our lives. He has truly given us everything pertaining to life and godliness! Praise God for His rich blessings.