

Stop Calling It “Godly” When It’s Actually Harmful

By System Import | Sermon | March 13, 2026

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We live in a time where labels can be incredibly deceiving. You can buy a bottle of juice labeled "All Natural" only to read the ingredients and find it is full of processed sugars and chemicals. The label is there to sell the product, not to tell the truth. Tragically, this same deception has infiltrated the church. We have slapped the label "Godly" on behaviors, attitudes, and cultural habits that are actually destructive, toxic, and unbiblical. We call passivity "patience." We call enabling abuse "forgiveness." We call workaholism "ministry." We call suppression of emotions "faith." By mislabeling these things, we sanctify our dysfunction. We give a spiritual pass to behaviors that are destroying our mental health, our families, and our witness to the world. We think we are pleasing God, but we are actually just feeding a religious system that grinds people into dust. Jesus didn't come to set up a system of religious pretense; He came to bring life, and life abundantly. When our version of "godliness" produces death, anxiety, and brokenness, we need to stop and ask: Is this actually God, or is it a man-made tradition masquerading as holiness? The enemy loves to dress up as an angel of light. He loves to take a truth, twist it just enough to make it toxic, and then feed it to the flock. And before we dive in, if this message is already stirring something in you, hit the subscribe button and stay connected to God's Word daily, because we believe that truth sets us free. Today, we are going to do the hard work of peeling off the labels. We are going to expose seven specific behaviors that Christians often praise as "godly" but which are actually harmful traps. This is a call to discernment. It is a call to stop drinking poison just because it comes in a chalice. It is time to separate the traditions of men from the truth of God and walk in the healthy, vibrant freedom that Jesus paid for.

The danger of "harmful godliness" is that it is very difficult to critique because it looks so right on the surface. If you criticize a drug dealer, everyone agrees. But if you criticize a person who is "serving the Lord" until they have a heart attack and destroy their family, people get defensive. They say, "But they are doing it for Jesus!" We have confused sacrifice with suicide. We have confused holiness with hardness. We have confused unity with silence in the face of evil. This confusion keeps the church sick. It keeps us trapped in cycles of abuse and burnout because we are afraid that if we set a boundary or take a nap, we are being "ungodly." We need to go back to the Bible. We need to see how Jesus lived. Jesus was the most godly man to ever walk the earth, yet He disappointed people, He slept during storms, He called out religious leaders, and He refused to let people manipulate Him. His godliness was wild, free, and deeply healthy. It wasn't the neurotic, anxious, rule-keeping religion that many of us have inherited. True godliness leads to wholeness. It leads to the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. If your version of godliness is producing anxiety, resentment, burnout, and control, it is not the fruit of the Spirit; it is the fruit of the flesh dressed up

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in Sunday clothes. Today, we are going to look at the idols we have erected in the church—the idol of “Nice,” the idol of Busyness, the idol of Stoicism—and we are going to smash them with the hammer of the Word. It is time to get real. It is time to stop calling toxicity “virtue.”

Number 1: The Idol of “Nice” Christianity (Passivity vs. Peacemaking)

One of the most pervasive and harmful lies in the church is the equation of “godliness” with being “nice.” We are taught that Christians should always be polite, soft-spoken, agreeable, and never cause a scene. We smile when we are angry. We say “yes” when we want to say “no.” We tolerate disrespect and overlook evil because we don’t want to be “divisive.” We label this passivity as “meekness” or “turning the other cheek,” but in reality, it is cowardice. It is the fear of man masquerading as the love of God. The “Idol of Nice” keeps us from speaking the truth in love because we are terrified of the conflict that truth might bring. We choose the comfort of a false peace over the disruption of a true resolution.

But Jesus was not “nice.” He was good. There is a massive difference. A nice person never confronts you; a good person confronts you because they love you. Jesus made a whip of cords and drove the money changers out of the temple. That wasn’t nice; it was terrifying. He called the Pharisees “whitewashed tombs” and “vipers.” That wasn’t polite; it was prophetic. He looked at Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan!” Jesus was not afraid of tension. He was not afraid of hurting feelings if it meant saving souls. True godliness is fierce. It loves the truth too much to stay silent when lies are being spoken. It loves the victim too much to stay silent when the oppressor is active. When we call our passivity “godliness,” we are actually enabling evil to flourish under the cover of our silence.

This harmful version of godliness destroys relationships. When you bury your anger and frustration to be “nice,” you are burying landmines. Eventually, someone is going to step on one, and you will explode. Or, you will develop a root of bitterness that poisons your soul. The Bible tells us to “be angry and do not sin” (Ephesians 4:26). It acknowledges that anger is a valid response to wrong. The godly response is not to pretend you aren’t angry; it is to handle that anger constructively, to have the hard conversation, to set the boundary, and to seek resolution. Avoiding conflict is not a fruit of the Spirit. Peacemaking is. And peacemaking is active work. It often requires breaking the false peace to establish the true peace.

We need to stop praising people for being doormats. We need to stop telling women that being a “godly wife” means accepting abuse without a word. We need to stop telling employees that being a “Christian worker” means letting the boss exploit them. This is not godliness; it is enablement. God gave you a voice. He gave you a backbone. He gave you a sword (the Word). You are meant to use them. To stand up for righteousness, to speak against injustice, and to refuse to be

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manipulated is not "un-Christian"; it is the very essence of walking in the authority of Christ. Let us trade the Idol of Nice for the virtue of Courage. Let us be people who are kind, yes, but also formidable in our defense of the truth.

Number 2: The Trap of "Sanctified" Busyness (Workaholism vs. Stewardship)

Another harmful behavior we often label as "godly" is overworking in the name of the Kingdom. We praise the pastor who never takes a day off. We applaud the volunteer who is at the church every single night of the week, neglecting their family. We look at burnout as a badge of honor, proof that we have "poured ourselves out" for Jesus. We create a culture where saying "I'm so busy" is a humble brag, implying that we are important and essential to God's plan. We label this frantic, exhausted existence as "zeal" or "dedication." But often, it is simply workaholism baptized in holy water. It is trying to earn God's love—or the approval of people—through performance.

God established the Sabbath before the Fall of man. Rest is not a result of sin; it is a part of creation's perfection. When we refuse to rest, we are violating a commandment just as surely as if we were stealing or lying. We are acting as if we are God—limitless, inexhaustible, and indispensable. We are saying, "God, You need my help to run the universe; it will fall apart if I sleep." This is arrogance. "Sanctified" busyness is harmful because it destroys the temple of the Holy Spirit (your body) and the first ministry God gave you (your family). If you save the whole world but lose your own children because you were never home, you have failed the biblical mandate (1 Timothy 3:5).

Jesus had a rhythm. He ministered to the crowds, yes, but He also frequently "withdrew to desolate places and prayed" (Luke 5:16). He slept in the boat during the storm. He took the disciples away for a retreat. He knew that you cannot pour from an empty cup. When we call our lack of boundaries "godliness," we are lying to ourselves. We are using ministry as a drug to numb our pain or to feed our ego. We are running on adrenaline instead of the anointing. The result is a church full of tired, irritable, hollow leaders who have no joy left to give.

If this message inspires you, don't forget to subscribe for more Bible insights every week. We need to redefine godliness to include stewardship of our energy. It is godly to say "no." It is godly to take a nap. It is godly to turn off the phone and play with your kids. It is godly to have a hobby that has nothing to do with "ministry." God is not a slave driver; He is a Shepherd. He leads us beside still waters, not into a whirlpool of activity. If your yoke is hard and your burden is heavy, you are not carrying the yoke of Jesus. You are carrying the yoke of religious expectation. Drop it. Rest is a weapon. Use it.

Number 3: The Weaponization of Forgiveness (Enabling vs. Releasing)

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Perhaps one of the most dangerous distortions in the church is the weaponization of forgiveness. We are taught that to be godly, we must forgive. This is true; forgiveness is a command. But we often conflate forgiveness with *reconciliation* and *restoration of trust*. We tell victims of abuse, betrayal, or toxic behavior that if they have truly forgiven, they must let the offender back into their lives as if nothing happened. We say, "Forgive and forget." We pressure people to "make up" prematurely. We call boundaries "unforgiveness." We label the person who protects themselves as "bitter."

This is incredibly harmful. It empowers abusers and re-victimizes the innocent. The Bible commands us to forgive (release the debt, let go of vengeance), but it does not command us to trust someone who has proven untrustworthy. Jesus forgave the soldiers who nailed Him to the cross, but He didn't invite them to dinner. Paul forgave Alexander the Coppersmith, but he warned Timothy, "Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message" (2 Timothy 4:15). Paul forgave, but he kept a boundary. Forgiveness takes one person; reconciliation takes two people doing the work of repentance.

When we call enabling "godliness," we remove the consequences of sin. If a husband beats his wife, and the church tells her to just "forgive him and go back," they are removing the consequence that might lead him to repentance. They are putting her in danger in the name of Jesus. This is not godliness; it is complicity with evil. True godliness forgives the sinner but hates the sin enough to stop it from happening again. It demands fruit of repentance before restoring the relationship. It values the safety of the sheep over the comfort of the wolf.

We must stop using the word "forgiveness" to silence victims. You can forgive someone and file a police report. You can forgive someone and never speak to them again. You can forgive someone and divorce them for biblical grounds. Forgiveness is a vertical transaction between you and God where you release the bitterness; trust is a horizontal transaction between you and a person that must be earned over time. Do not let anyone manipulate you into exposing yourself to harm just to prove you are a "good Christian." Guard your heart, for out of it flow the issues of life.

Number 4: The Guilt of "Never Enough" (Perfectionism vs. Holiness)

Many Christians live under a crushing cloud of low-grade guilt. They feel they never pray enough, never witness enough, never give enough, and never love enough. They strive for a standard of perfection that is impossible to reach. When they fail, they beat themselves up. They live in a perpetual state of "trying harder." And they label this neurosis as "hunger for righteousness" or "pursuit of holiness." They think that feeling bad about themselves is a sign of spiritual sensitivity. They think that God is a harsh taskmaster standing over them with a clipboard, shaking His head

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at their performance.

This is not godliness; it is a rejection of the finished work of Christ. It is a subtle form of legalism. It says, "Jesus paid for my sins, but now I have to maintain my standing with God through my performance." It replaces the grace of God with the effort of the flesh. This mindset leads to anxiety, depression, and eventually, giving up. If you can never please God, why try? It turns the Good News into bad news. It turns the Father into a Boss.

True godliness is born out of rest, not striving. It starts with the realization that you are fully accepted in the Beloved, not because of what you do, but because of who Jesus is. Holiness is not a white-knuckle attempt to be perfect; it is the natural fruit of abiding in the Vine. When you know you are loved, you want to obey. When you know you are forgiven, you want to serve. The motive changes from fear ("I better do this or God will be mad") to love ("I want to do this because God is so good").

If this message inspires you, don't forget to subscribe for more Bible insights every week. Stop calling your perfectionism "godliness." Perfectionism is focused on **you**—your performance, your image, your record. Godliness is focused on **Him**—His grace, His power, His sufficiency. God knows you are dust (Psalm 103:14). He does not expect you to be an angel; He expects you to be a dependent child. Give yourself permission to be imperfect. Give yourself permission to be in process. The only perfect thing about you is Jesus. Rest in Him. That rest is the holiest thing you can do.

Number 5: The Spirit of Poverty (Misery vs. Contentment)

There is a strain of teaching that equates godliness with poverty, misery, and lack. We look at the rich with suspicion. We feel guilty if we have nice things. We think that to be truly spiritual, we should be struggling. We label this "humility" or "simplicity." We refuse to enjoy the blessings God gives us because we think suffering is inherently more holy than joy. We hoard our money out of fear (calling it "stewardship") or we refuse to invest in ourselves because we don't think we are worth it.

This "poverty gospel" is just as damaging as the "prosperity gospel." Both obsess over money. One obsesses over getting it; the other obsesses over avoiding it. But the Bible says, "God... richly provides us with everything to enjoy" (1 Timothy 6:17). God is a Father. A good father loves to see his children enjoy his gifts. Abraham was wealthy. David was wealthy. Lydia was wealthy. Having resources is not a sin; trusting in them is.

When we call misery "godliness," we slander the character of God. We make Him look stingy. We

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make Christianity look unattractive to the world. Who wants to join a faith that demands you be miserable? True godliness is contentment (Philippians 4:11). Contentment means I can be happy with a lot, and I can be happy with a little. It means my joy is not tied to my stuff. But it also means I have the freedom to enjoy a good meal, a nice home, or a vacation without guilt.

Stop apologizing for God's favor. If He has blessed you, receive it with thanksgiving and use it to bless others. Don't act like a pauper when you are a child of the King. False humility rejects the gift; true humility thanks the Giver. Don't let a religious spirit steal your joy. You are allowed to be happy. You are allowed to thrive. God is glorified when His children flourish, just as He is glorified when they endure lack with grace. The point is Him, not the bank account.

Number 6: The Mask of "Spiritual" Stoicism (Suppression vs. Lament)

In many Christian circles, displaying negative emotions is seen as a lack of faith. If you are sad, "rejoice in the Lord." If you are anxious, "fear not." If you are grieving, "they are in a better place." We slap Bible verses on deep emotional wounds like band-aids on a bullet hole. We think that a godly person is always smiling, always "blessed and highly favored," and never struggles with doubt or pain. We label this emotional suppression as "walking in victory." But it is actually harmful stoicism. It is dishonesty.

The Bible is filled with raw emotion. Read the Psalms. David screams at God, cries until his bed is swimming with tears, and asks "Why have you forsaken me?" Jeremiah wishes he had never been born. Even Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus and sweated drops of blood in Gethsemane. Was Jesus ungodly when He wept? Was David lacking faith when he lamented? No. They were human. They brought their pain *to* God, not *away* from Him.

When we force people to hide their pain to fit a "godly" mold, we create a culture of hypocrisy. People smile in the lobby while they are dying inside. They don't ask for help because they are ashamed of their struggle. This leads to isolation, addiction, and suicide within the church. True godliness includes the practice of Lament. Lament is bringing your brokenness to God and trusting Him enough to be honest. It is saying, "God, this hurts, and I don't understand."

We need to stop calling denial "faith." Faith is not pretending the cancer isn't there; faith is trusting God *in the middle* of the cancer. Faith is not suppressing the grief; faith is grieving with hope. It is healthy to cry. It is healthy to say "I'm not okay." God can handle your emotions. He created them. When we are honest about our weakness, His strength is made perfect. Let's take off the mask of the plastic saint and be real humans redeemed by a real God.

Number 7: The Bondage of Legalistic Loyalty (Cult vs. Community)

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Finally, one of the most destructive things labeled "godly" is blind loyalty to a leader or a denomination. We are taught that "touch not the Lord's anointed" means we cannot question a pastor, even when they are abusive or heretical. We are told that leaving a church is "rebellion." We are told that submitting to authority means checking our brains at the door. We label this control as "covenant" or "spiritual covering." But often, it is simply a cult-like spirit of control.

True spiritual authority serves; it does not enslave. It empowers; it does not control. The Bereans were praised in Acts 17:11 because they did not just blindly believe Paul; they "examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so." They tested the apostle against the Word. That is true godliness. Loyalty to God must always supersede loyalty to a man or an institution. If a leader asks you to do something unethical, unbiblical, or harmful, the godly response is to say "no."

When we call blind submission "godliness," we enable spiritual abuse. We create systems where leaders are unaccountable gods. This hurts the sheep. God hates it when His shepherds feed themselves on the flock (Ezekiel 34). You are responsible for your own soul. You cannot stand before God on judgment day and say, "My pastor told me to do it." God will say, "I gave you My Word and My Spirit; why didn't you listen to Me?"

Godly community is based on mutual love, respect, and freedom, not fear and coercion. If you are in a place where you cannot ask questions, where you feel controlled, or where you are shamed for thinking differently, that is not a godly church; it is a spiritual prison. Break the chain. True leaders want you to grow up into Christ, not remain dependent on them. Walk in the freedom of the sons and daughters of God.

Conclusion

We have looked at the seven counterfeits: the Idol of Nice, the Trap of Busyness, the Weaponization of Forgiveness, the Guilt of Perfectionism, the Spirit of Poverty, the Mask of Stoicism, and the Bondage of Blind Loyalty. These are heavy burdens. They are the "traditions of men" that make the Word of God of no effect.

If you have been carrying these burdens, thinking they were your cross to bear, I have good news: You can put them down. Jesus didn't die to make you nice, busy, miserable, or fake. He died to make you free. He died to make you whole. He died to bring you into a relationship with the Father that is based on truth and grace.

It is time to stop calling poison "medicine." It is time to stop calling harm "godliness." Be brave enough to examine your life and your beliefs. Keep what is biblical; throw away what is cultural. Walk in the wild, beautiful, healthy holiness of Jesus. It might offend the religious Pharisees, but it

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will bring life to you and everyone around you.

Before you go, make sure to subscribe, like this video, and share it with someone who needs encouragement today. And join us next time as we uncover another powerful truth from God's Word.

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