

## Living in Christ, Starving the Flesh

***“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.”***

Romans 13:14 NASB

Our verse is Romans 13:14. This precious Word from God specifically addresses Christians and contains two commands— “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” and “make no provision for the flesh.” However, the verse first introduces the commands by calling the Christian’s attention to a contrast. Note the conjunction “But” at the beginning of the verse. The contrast is a contrast to that which came before. In one sense this contrast is a way of summing up the entire existence of the Christian as his or her life after regeneration is to be a contrast to his or her life prior to becoming a Christian.

Verse 13 mentions some specific aspects of life prior to regeneration: carousing, drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, sensuality, strife and jealousy. Verse 12 refers to these as deeds of darkness. That is, these are the deeds characteristic of those who are in darkness and are darkness (Compare Eph. 5:8-12). However, a Christian is no longer darkness but light in the world (Matt. 5:14; Phil. 2:15). For this reason Christians are exhorted to put on the armor of light (Rm. 13:12) and walk as they actually are—children of light (Eph. 5:8).

Therefore, in contrast to their former way of life described in Romans 13:13, Christians are commanded in verse 14 to:

***“Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.”***

Here is sanctification stated in perhaps its most simple and direct form—put on Christ and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts. These two commands encompass what it is the believer is to do and what the believer is not to do.

### **1. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.**

The Greek verb translated “Put on” addresses specifically the Christians at Rome to whom the letter was originally written but essentially the command applies to all Christians. It is the same word used in verse 12 with reference to putting on the armor of light. From this Gk. word we actually get the English word “endue” which means, as it does also in the Greek, to “invest”, “put on” or “clothe.” Literally, the word can mean sink yourself into a garment or as we say “clothe yourself.”

Because the believer is of Christ, he or she is to be clothed with Christ. We could say that since the Christian is of Christ he is to look like Christ. Prior to salvation a person was darkness and therefore was clothed by the deeds of darkness. However, since salvation has come and the believer has been delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of Christ (Colossians 1:13), he is to be clothed with Christ.

To put this in the vernacular of the day we might say that the believer is to wear the uniform of Christ. Keep in mind though, that one does not wear a uniform to become that which the uniform represents. Instead, the uniform is worn because of the person’s relationship to that which the

uniform represents. Simply wearing a helmet, shoulder pads, and padded pants does not make a person a football player or a member of a football team. Instead, the uniform is properly worn by a genuine football player who belongs to a real team. While it is possible for just about anyone to wear a football uniform and perhaps even look very legitimate in it, it will become evident at the kickoff whether or not the person is really on the team or just a pretender. So it is with those who dress themselves in Christian behavior but have never been born of God. Under trial their forgery becomes evident (Matthew 13:18-23).

However, for the one truly of Christ, the command to don Christ is appropriate. Such a person who lives in Jesus lives like Jesus (1Jn. 2:5-6). For the Christian, putting on Christ is as natural as a bird taking flight or a doctor putting on a white coat and draping a stethoscope over his neck. It fits because it is what or who they are. Since Christians are Christ-like (the meaning of the word Christian) it is perfectly natural for them to be clothed in Christ's likeness. Therefore, we could say the command to the believer to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" does not fall on deaf ears. The response is immediate and willful.

We often check out our clothing and its appearance on us in a mirror. Suppose for a moment there existed a spiritual mirror which reflected a person's resemblance to the things of God. When the Christian approached this mirror he would look to see whether or not his life was like that of Christ. He would not look to see if his life pleased himself or whether or not his life was pleasing to his peers and he certainly would not even contemplate whether or not the spiritual image reflected back to him pleased the world. No. His concern would be on whether or not his life, both the spiritual as well as the practical resembled Christ. The reason for this is simple. It is evident from Scripture that it is the character of Christians to learn and do that which pleases the Lord (Eph. 5:10; Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 4:1). Furthermore, the Christian knows that God the Father is well pleased with Christ (Matthew 3:17; 17:5) and therefore to look like Christ is to please the Father. Thus, the Christian looks to the mirror to see his life adorned with Christ. Thus, to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" is to live one's life as did Christ so as to reflect the life of Christ.

## **2. Make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.**

As will be mentioned later, this second command is a complement to the first. Christians clothed in Christ rightly make no provision for the flesh, for to do so results in a compromise of the former—putting on Christ.

The Greek noun translated *provision* is an interesting word. In the context it communicates the idea of *provisions* used to sustain something. For instance, food is a provision for nourishment to health. Thus, when we read that we are ***not to make provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts***, we could rightly understand that the command is to starve the flesh of its nourishment. We could say, "Do not feed the flesh" and by this would be meant that we are not to go to those places and/or not be involved in those things that would provide nourishment to the old desires that ruled one's life prior to becoming a Christian.

An Old Testament example of this and there are many, would for instance be Psalm 101:3 where David said,

***“I will set no worthless thing before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; It shall not fasten its grip on me.”***

Essentially, David recognized the propensity of his flesh and acknowledged it was necessary that he not set before his eyes the worthless things of those who fall away, lest their work fasten its grip on him. Simply put, he would avoid that which could cause him to stumble. Elsewhere David said, “I have set the Lord always before me: because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved” (Psalm 16:8). A New Testament parallel to these verses is our verse in Romans, “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.” When David failed to set the Lord before himself and placed himself in a compromising situation, his flesh or in other words his carnal desires were nourished. Consequently, sin fastened its grip on him (2 Sam 11).

Therefore, in accord then with Romans 13:14 one way of not nourishing the flesh is to avoid those compromising conditions that would arouse the lusts of the flesh. This very practical method of starving the flesh is both biblical and instrumental in not making provision for the flesh. But this practical method must first be rooted in another practice.

As stated earlier, the word translated “provision” is an interesting word and perhaps contained in its etymology there is a hint of the first step as to how Christian’s are to ensure no opportunity is given to the flesh. The Greek word is actually a combination of two words one of which deals with *knowledge*. Thus, hinted at in the word translated *provision* is that truth stated explicitly elsewhere in Scripture regarding the necessity to renew the mind in order to be transformed into the very image of Christ (Rm. 12:2; 2 Cor. 10:5; Col. 3:1-5, etc...). As the mind is set on things above as opposed to the things of the earth the mind is transformed and the flesh is starved. Thus, and to state this briefly, starving the flesh of its sustenance begins in the mind as the Christian fills his or her mind with the Word of God. Such a filling transforms the life and moves the believer to come out from the world and be separate from it (2 Cor. 6:17).

Essentially, living by the Word of God clothes the believer in Christ and starves the flesh. Remember the mirror we spoke of earlier. In one sense it does exist. It is the Word of God. It reveals the standard of Christ. As we evaluate our lives in its light we can see whether or not we are walking as Christ walked and how much we resemble Him.

### **Notes on the Complementary Nature of this Verse**

Just as we are nourished by the contrasting nature of these commands we can be nourished by the complementary nature of the commands. For they stand not only as contrasts to the former condition but as complements of the latter condition. This is to say that the commands are fitting or complementary in the following ways:

1. Complementary with one another.
2. Complementary with the nature of God.
3. Complementary with the new nature of the believer.

4. Complementary with God's work of sanctification.
5. Complementary with God's eternal plan for the believer.
6. Complementary with the exaltation of Christ.
7. Complementary with ascribing glory to the Father.
8. Complementary with the unity of the Godhead.
9. Complementary with ascribing glory to the Godhead.

1. *Complementary with one another other.*

The two commands are to be understood as complements to each other as obedience to the first necessitates obedience to the second. The one who puts on Christ must at the same time not be making provision for the flesh. For the righteousness of Christ has no partnership with the lawlessness of the flesh. There can exist no fellowship between Christ, Who is the light of the world and the flesh which loves darkness. Just as there can be no harmony between Christ and Belial, there can be no harmony between the new man whose Lord is Christ and the old man whose lord was the devil. There is no harmony and there is no commonality. The Christian serves Christ as His God and the flesh serves self as its idol. Thus, the command to put on the Lord Jesus finds its complement in the command to make no provision for the flesh.

2. *Complementary with the nature of God.*

It is to be expected that God, Who is righteous and just commands those who belong to Him to be and do the same. For this is His desire for His people (Pr. 21:3; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). What more fitting way can this desire be expressed than by a command for His people to put on His only begotten Son in Whom He is well pleased. What greater standard could be conveyed than for the people of God to be clothed in the likeness of Christ Himself, Who is the exact representation of God in that He is God incarnate?

3. *Complementary with the new nature of the believer.*

One would not command a dog to fly except to prove that it could not. Neither would one command a bird to bark except to prove it could not. But one would command a dog to bark as a complement to its nature as a dog and likewise, a bird to fly as the command and the act of flying would certainly be fitting to its very nature as a bird. Thus, the commands are addressed to believers and are to be obeyed by the believer as that which is fitting for his new nature in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

4. *Complementary with God's work in sanctification.*

This work of sanctification is the very work that God the Holy Spirit is doing in the believer (Phil. 2:12). Therefore, God's command for believers to participate with Him serves as a complement to His work in them. Christians are to put on Christ so that their lives become adorned with the Lord Jesus Christ and thus they cooperate with God in this precious process of sanctification.

5. *Complementary with God's eternal purpose for the believer.*

It is God's predetermined plan to conform His people to the image of His Son Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29). God will achieve this purpose as the text of Romans 8:30 communicates those "whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also

justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” The past tense of each of the verbs communicates the certainty of their accomplishment. God will conform His people to the image of His Son, thus His command’s for Christians to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh complements His eternal purpose.

6. *Complementary with the exaltation of Christ.*

The Christian’s conformity to the image of Christ is not an end in itself rather it is a means to a greater end. This is to say that conformity to Christ’s image is not merely for the sake of the Christian. God’s purpose in conforming the believer to the image of Christ is that Christ be “... the first-born among many brethren” (Romans 8:29). Thus, God’s greater purpose in conforming His people to the image of Christ is to exalt Christ. Therefore, the commands to “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh” complement God the Father’s purpose of glorifying Christ Who is God the Son.

7. *Complementary with ascribing glory to the Father.*

As Christ is exalted in glory the Father will be glorified (Jn. 12:28; 17:1; 1Cor. 15:23-26). Thus, because the commands for the believer to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and not to make provision for the flesh are complements to the exaltation of Christ, they are also complementary with the glorification of the Father, for to glorify the Son is to glorify the Father.

8. *Complementary with the unity of the Godhead.*

The commands to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh are complementary with the unity of the Godhead for all three persons of the Trinity work in absolute unity to conform believers to Christ’s image so that, as we shall see in the next point God is glorified.

9. *Complementary with ascribing glory to the Godhead.*

Ultimately, the exaltation of Christ to glory and that ascribing glory to the Father will work together to ascribe glory to the Godhead that God may be all in all (1 Cor. 15:27-28). Therefore, the two commands of Romans 13:14 are complementary with the ultimate purpose of glorifying God.