

We come this morning for the fourth time to this text. It has two basic commands: a positive command (put on the Lord Jesus Christ), and a negative command (and make no provision for the flesh). I've suggested we can summarize the positive command with three words: reckoning, obtaining, and imitating. Having seen the first two, we come this morning to the third. To put on Christ is to put on His character by way of imitation.

As we've seen over the past several weeks, Scripture often describes our sanctification in terms of putting off and on. It's as if sin and evil practices are garments that need to be put off, and virtue and righteous practices are garments that need to be put on.

Rom.13:12—"Let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light" Col.3:8—"But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, and filthy language out of your mouth" v12—"As the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, patience and love."

Thus, when Paul exhorts us to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" he means, in part, we are to put on the character traits of Christ. We are to put on those moral virtues, as if a garment, that were perfectly in Christ.

- I. What are we to Imitate?
- II. Why are we to Imitate?
- III. How are we to Imitate?

I. What are we to Imitate?

1. Before I go any further, I need to first of provide three important clarifications that need to be underscored.
2. (a) Christ is to be trusted before He's imitated—most people in the world are not opposed of viewing Christ as an example.
3. The problem with that is—Christ is more than an example; He's the GodMan who died for the sins of the world.
4. Thus, Christ must first be trusted—He must first be received as Lord and then followed as an example.
5. (b) Christ can only be imitated as He's seen in Scripture—several years ago, the phrase, What Would Jesus Do, became popular; it was on bracelets, necklaces, and T-shirts.
6. It became popular because few people asked a second question—How do we know what Jesus would do?
7. That is, the only way we can know what Jesus would do, is by looking into the Bible to see what He actually did.
8. Thus, when we are told to imitate Christ—to live as He lived—we are not free to guess what He would do.
9. We must look into the Scriptures to see what He actually did, and then we must follow or imitate His example.
10. Let me put it this way—following someone's example, implies there's a clear example to be followed.
11. (c) Not everything Christ did is to be imitated—for example, no one is expected to imitate His miracles.
12. Nowhere are we told to turn water into wine, multiply the bread and fish, walk on water, or raise the dead.

13. But in general, we are to imitate every moral action and attitude of our Savior as He was the perfect Man.
14. John Owen—"There are two parts to the imitation of Christ. The first respects the internal grace and holiness of the human nature of Christ; the other, His example in duties of obedience. And both of them belong unto the constitution of a true disciple."
15. Thus, at this point I want to briefly survey 7 key NT texts that describe Christ as our example to imitate (I then want to suggest five things we are to imitate from Christ).
16. (1) Matt.11:28-30—"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give your rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."
17. This is one of the great gospel invitations of Scripture—Christ invites laboring and heavy-laden sinners to Himself.
18. He promises to remove something from them (give them rest), and yet place something upon them (take My yoke).
19. In short, He promises to deliver them from the law as a condemning law, and yet, they are to become His disciples.
20. They are to learn from Him—a disciple learns from his Master—the student learns from the Teacher.
21. But notice what we are to learn from Him—"I am gentle and lowly in heart"—we are to learn meekness and humility.
22. (2) Matt.16:24—"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."
23. To follow Christ, is to follow Him as a disciple; again, disciples learn from their masters through imitation.
24. To take up one's cross speaks of death—of daily denying oneself—just as Christ bore His cross, we are to bear our cross.
25. Obviously, Christ bore a cross in a way we can never—but the principle is evident—we are to bear our cross just as He bore His cross.
26. His cross-bearing is the pattern or example for our cross-bearing—we are to take up our cross, and follow Him.
27. (3) Jn.13:12-15—"You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you saw well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you."
28. Most Christians have not understood this passage to teach, Christians are to literally wash each other's feet.
29. Christ, in washing their feet, was merely giving an example of selfless or sacrificial servitude—they were to serve each other, just as He served them.
30. Now the greatest display of servitude would take place on the cross; where He humbly served His people.
31. Thus, as His disciples, we are to follow His example—we are to selflessly and sacrificially love others.
32. (4) Phil.2:5-11—"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus"—who placed the needs of others above His own.
33. (5) Heb.12:1-2—"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

34. In other words, the examples of OT saints (given in chapter 11), were to motivate the Hebrew Christians to also endure.
35. And yet, the greatest example of endurance, isn't found in the OT saints, but in the Lord Jesus Christ.
36. (6) 1Pet.2:20-23—"For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth, who when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously."
37. There's two things we are to imitate—the way we respond to those who mistreat us and the way we trust God.
38. (7) 1Jn.2:6—"He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked"—our profession and practice ought to harmonize.
39. To walk as Christ walked means to live as Christ lived—to imitate the way He loved God and His neighbor.
40. When John says, we are to walk "just as" He walked, he doesn't mean, we can live exactly as He lived.
41. We are to imitate Him, but our imitation will always fall short; we are to be like Him but we can never become Him.
42. Nathaniel Hardy—"Those graces which did flame forth in Christ's life, must at least sparkle in ours; which did shine bright in His, must twinkle in ours; which were perfectly in Him, must be sincerely in us."
43. Thus, in light of these seven texts, I want to suggest we are to follow the example of Christ in five areas.
44. (a) Moral purity—that is, we are to put on the moral virtues that were perfectly exemplified in Christ.
45. Love, compassion, patience, mercy and grace, as well as, our Savior's holy hatred for sin and hypocrisy.
46. Heb.7:26—"For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens."
47. (i) He was sincerely pure (everything He did was for the right reason); (ii) He was inwardly pure; (iii) He was outwardly pure.
48. (b) Self-denial—that is, we are to imitate the way our Savior refused to uphold or enforce His own rights.
49. Stop and think about this—because Christ is God (and a King) He deserved better treatment than He received.
50. He was born in a manger, to poor parents, lived a modest life; was mistreated, rejected, abused, and killed.
51. He never demanded His rights nor did He ever complain about His circumstances; this is self-denial.
52. Theologians often speak of His states of humiliation and exaltation; all that I've just described was His state of humiliation.
53. He was humbled before He was exalted—humiliation preceded exaltation—self-denial came before honor.
54. Just as Christ endured two states, of humiliation and exaltation, so every Christian also endures two states.
55. We are to follow Him through these two states—we now are in a state of humiliation that necessitates self-denial.

56. John Flavel—"Jesus Christ, for the glory of God, and the love He bare to the elect, denied Himself all the delights and pleasures of this world. Yet this was the least part of Christ's self-denial: What did He not deny when He left the bosom of His Father, with the ineffable delights and pleasures He there enjoyed from eternity, and instead thereof to drink the cup, the bitter cup of His Father's wrath, for our sake" O Christians, look to your pattern, and imitate your self-denying Savior."
57. (c) Selfless love—by this I mean, the way our Savior placed the needs of others before or above His own.
58. He came not to be served but to serve—"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her."
59. (d) Faith in God—Christ always had an eye to His Father; He trusted His Father would care for His every need.
60. In Christ we behold a Man who lived before the eyes of God; who committed Himself to the righteous Judge.
61. It's for this reason, we often find Him in secret prayer—taking refuge in the promises of His heavenly Father.
62. In short, in Christ we have the perfect example of fulfilling both tables of the law—love to God and love to our neighbor.
63. (e) Perseverance—Christ is the perfect example of endurance and perseverance through great opposition.
64. Betrayal, abuse, hardship, suffering and shame—none of these could keep our Savior from His task.

II. Why are we to Imitate?

1. Here I want to briefly suggest three reasons why Christians are to put on Christ by way of moral imitation.
2. (1) His example is perfect—that is, there's only one example that's worthy of perfect and perpetual imitation.
3. This of course doesn't mean we are never to imitate others, but we are to imitate them as they imitate Christ.
4. 1Cor.11:1—"Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ"—that is, imitate me only in so far as I imitate Christ.
5. Nowhere are we told to put on Matthew, John, Peter, or Paul—because none of these are perfect examples.
6. Yes, we are to imitate them, but only in so far as they followed the perfect example of the Lord Jesus.
7. I doubt most of us give this point sufficient thought—Christ exceeds every other man in moral beauty.
8. Ps.45:2—"You are fairer than the sons of men"—the term "fairer" is an older term that means "beautiful."
9. When the church says "You are fairer than the sons of men" she means, Christ is fairer than every other man.
10. There is no man who ever lived or will live that can match the moral beauty and perfection of Christ.
11. For example, just compare Him with the holiest of men—while Moses was meek what is that in comparison to Christ.
12. While Solomon was wise, what is that in comparison to Christ; and while Job was patient, what is that in comparison to Christ.

13. A.W. Pink—"Holy men and women of Scripture are to be imitated by us only as far as they were themselves conformed unto Christ. The best of their graces, the highest of their attainments, the most perfect of their duties, were spoiled by blemishes; but in Christ there is no imperfection whatever, for He had no sin and did no sin."
14. It's easy to be filled with pride when we compare ourselves with others—this was what the Pharisees did.
15. They judged themselves among themselves, and whenever we do that, we will find reason to praise ourselves.
16. But when we compare ourselves to Christ, we will only find reason to humble ourselves in our esteem.
17. (2) His example is our pattern—by this I mean, Christ is the pattern or prototype of every other Christian.
18. Original man (Adam), was created in the image of God—this image was largely lost through the fall.
19. God Himself, in the person of the Son, took to Himself human nature, in which God's image was restored.
20. We are radically restored into His image in conversion; progressively transformed into it in sanctification; and perfectly conformed into His image in our glorification.
21. Rom.8:29—"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren."
22. Thus, Christ is the pattern for all Christians, regardless when or where they live—old, young, rich, and poor.
23. Every Christian is in the process of being conformed into the image of Christ—He is the divine prototype.
24. John Owen—"One end why God sent His Son to take our nature upon Him, was that He might set us an example in our own nature, in one who was like unto us in all things, sin only excepted, of that renovation of His image in us and of that holy obedience which He requires of us. Such an example was needful, that we might never be at a loss about the will of God in His commands, having a glorious representation of it before our eyes; and this could be given us no otherwise but in our own nature."
25. (3) His example fulfills God's precepts—that is, in the life of Christ we find a perfect transcript of the law.
26. What if someone asked you—What is the nature of true holiness? What is it, that defines Biblical holiness?
27. Is true holiness heart obedience to the law, or is it conformity to Christ? Well, these are the same things.
28. As we behold Christ on the pages of Holy Scripture, we see a man who perfectly obeyed the law of God.
29. We can read our duty in the law and in the example of Christ—because these are one and the same thing.
30. Perhaps I can illustrate it this way—to act contrary to the example of Christ, or failure to imitate that example, is sin.
31. And yet, Scripture expressly tells us that acting contrary to the law of God is sin—they are the same thing.
32. A.W. Pink—"Example is better than precept. Why? Because a precept is more or less an abstraction, whereas an example sets before us a concrete representation, having more of an aptitude to incite the mind to imitation."

III. How are we to Imitate?

1. Here, in closing, I simply want to suggest two ways we put Christ on by way of imitation (fix your eyes upon Christ and walk by the Spirit of Christ).
2. (1) Fix your eyes upon Christ—by this I mean, we must fix our eyes of faith upon Christ as found in Scripture.
3. John Owen—"As Christ is the prototype in the eye of God for the communication of all grace unto us, so He ought to be the great example in the eye of our faith in all our obedience unto God."
4. It's inevitable we will become like those we associate with—man by nature imitates those around him.
5. We become like those we spend time with—if we spend time with wicked people, we will become like them.
6. Prov.13:20—"He who walks with wise *men* will be wise"—it's impossible not to be influenced by others.
7. Thus, the best way to become like Christ (or to put on Christ), is to spend time with Christ in fellowship.
8. 2Cor.3:18—"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."
9. Paul has been contrasting the Old and New Covenants—most people within the OC were blinded to the truth.
10. In fact, most of the Jews in Paul's day were still blinded—there was a spiritual veil over their spiritual eyes.
11. In contrast to this, "we all," that is, every member of the NC and better covenant have had the veil removed.
12. V18—"But we all, with unveiled face"—he then makes one of the most important statements, with regards to our sanctification, in the NT (let me summarize it with two words – beholding and becoming).
13. (a) Beholding—"beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord"—by mirror is meant the gospel as found in Scripture.
14. It is here we behold the glory of the Lord—it's only in Scripture we behold the glory of God in Christ.
15. Thus, by "beholding" is meant "beholding Christ with the eyes of the soul"—with eyes of faith and love.
16. (b) Becoming—"are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory"—as we behold Him, we are inwardly changed into His image (from glory to glory).
17. This is by the Spirit of the Lord—the Holy Spirit enables us to put on Christ as we behold Him by faith.
18. (2) Walk by the Spirit of Christ, Gal.5:16—"Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh."
19. To walk in or by the Spirit means you live dependent upon the Spirit; you're mindful of your need for Him.
20. This is how Christ walked the way He walked, Acts 10:38—"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good."
21. Remember, Christ is God and Man—and as Man He relied upon the Holy Spirit for everything He did.
22. This is how Christ lived a pure, self-denying, loving, trusting, and persevering life—it was by the Spirit.
23. Thus, while it's true, Christ was given the Spirit without measure, we have all the same Spirit in measure.