

Putting on Christ

by Charles Finney

To put on Christ means to assume His character and peculiarities, and to imitate Him in all aspects of life, which is essential for obedience to God and salvation.

Scripture: Matthew 5:16, John 15:5, Romans 13:14, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 4:24, Philippians 2:5, Colossians 3:10, 1 Peter 2:21, 1 John 2:6

Topics: "Imitating Christ", "Selflessness"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the command to 'put on the Lord Jesus Christ' as a call to imitate Christ's character and live selflessly for the well-being of others. He outlines the implications of this command, including the necessity of deep study of Christ's character, the importance of intention and belief in one's ability to embody Christ, and the universal obligation to obey this command for salvation. Finney warns of the consequences of both obeying and disobeying this command, highlighting that true obedience leads to peace, joy, and a representation of God's character, while disobedience results in hypocrisy and spiritual ruin. Ultimately, he calls for a genuine commitment to live as Christ would in every aspect of life.

Transcript

'But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.'--Rom. 13:14.

It is my purpose to show,

I. WHAT IS INTENDED BY THIS COMMAND.

II. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN OBEYING IT.

III. SOME OF THE ESSENTIAL CONDITIONS OF OBEDIENCE TO IT.

IV. OBLIGATION TO OBEY THIS COMMAND IS UNIVERSAL.

V. OBEDIENCE TO THE REQUIREMENTS OF THIS TEXT IS NATURALLY INDISPENSABLE TO SALVATION.

VI. SOME OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF OBEYING THIS REQUIREMENT.

VII. CONSEQUENCES OF DISOBEYING IT.

I. What is intended by this command.

I observe that the idea is taken from the drama; 'To put on a person,' is to assume his character, and peculiarities, as an actor does on the stage. This commandment, therefore, enjoins the imitation of Christ, as actors imitate those whom they represent.

II. What is implied in obeying this command.

1. It implies the putting away of selfishness. Christ was not selfish. Selfishness is the preference of self-gratification, to the will of God, and the good of the universe, and Christ never did this. The Apostle adds, 'and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.' Here, he contrasts 'putting on Christ,' and 'making provision for the flesh,' which is the same as selfishness. Paul was more philosophical than any of the sacred writers, and employs the language--'works of the flesh,' 'following after the flesh,' 'carnal mind,' & c. to designate the nature of sin. But the whole Bible condemns self-seeking as wrong, and inconsistent with the true service of God, or imitation of Christ.

2. It implies living for the same end for which Christ lived. What was his end? Not the gratification of self, but the well-being of the universe, and whoever puts Him on must adopt the same end.

3. It implies the same singleness of eye. Christ's eye was not double, but exclusively directed to one end, the glory of God.

4. It implies such a sympathy with Him, as to beget an imitation of Him. A profound sympathy is necessary to, and naturally begets imitation.

III. Some of the essential conditions of obedience to this command.

1. The first thing essential, is a deep and intense study of his character, until the great principle of his action is clearly perceived--the real idea of the end for which he lived clearly developed. Persons attempting to imitate others, must give the closest attention. This is essential to the success of a dramatic actor, or any other artist. Who, when looking at a picture by West, and observing all its delicate shadings, has not been struck with the deep attention which the artist must have given to his subject? One shade is stronger, and another weaker, exactly exhibiting the position, and form of each limb, and the various expressions of countenance and attitude, appropriate to the circumstances of the person represented. Now in order to express these things, by colorings on the canvass, the artist must have studied most intensely. So it is with a good actor. He does not merely commit and rehearse his piece as a school-boy does on the stage. He does not stand and spout it off in recitation style, but seeks to represent his character in dress, habit, spirit, style, manner, and every thing, and in this consists the perfection of the dramatic art. Now the Apostle commands us thus to put on Christ--to imitate Him--to give intense thought to get at the true idea of his character, and to commit the mind fully to the same end, to which He was devoted. To enjoy a piece of poetry, you must put yourself into the same state of mind in which the author was when he wrote it. Then as you read it, your tone and manner will naturally represent him. This is the difficulty with so many in reading hymns. They read as though they did not at all apprehend the sentiment, and without emotion. The reason is, either they have not the spirit of devotion, or they have not at all given attention to the sentiment of the hymn. But to represent Christ we must catch his spirit, and make his grand end and aim ours. Then we shall act as He would under like circumstances.

2. Another essential is, you must fully believe that through grace you can put Him on. While you don't believe you can, of course you cannot. No one can intend to do what he believes he cannot do. It is absurd to suppose the contrary. No one intends to fly. Why? Because every one knows he cannot. We may wish to fly, while we do not believe we can, but to intend it is impossible. So unless you believe you can put on Christ, it is utterly impossible that you should intend to do it, and this is the great reason why so many never actually put Him on.

3. You must, therefore, not only fully believe that you can, but you must actually intend to put on Christ--to make Him your whole example. Unless it is intended, it will never be done by accident.

4. You must be fully prepared to make any sacrifice--you must count the cost, and make up your mind to meet the expense necessary to the accomplishment of this end. You must make any sacrifice of friends, property, or credit, which stand in the way. The Lord Jesus Christ teaches this, and warns persons not to make themselves ridiculous by beginning to build, without being able to finish. The truth is, unless persons have made up their minds to the absolute sacrifice of whatever hinders their fully putting on Christ, they have not got hold of the very first principle of religion.

5. You must realize the importance of doing this. Suppose a dramatic author should write an admirable drama, adapted powerfully to awaken the attention, and arouse the passions of the spectators of its exhibition, but the actors should so poorly prepare themselves, and so poorly act it, as perfectly to misrepresent him. It is easy to see how they would injure the credit, both of the author and drama. So persons who do not fully put on the Lord Jesus Christ, while they profess to be his followers, are doing Him, and his cause, the greatest injury of which they are capable. They should then realize the infinite importance of fully representing Him.

6. Another condition of putting on Christ is, that you should keep up a constant intercourse with Him. You must commune with Him in prayer without ceasing. Who does not know that an actor needs to drink into, and commune with the spirit of the author profoundly, if he would truly represent him. He must get the state of mind of the man who wrote it; in short he must 'put on' the writer. If he does not he will misrepresent him. So there must be constant communion with the Spirit of Christ, in order to put Him on and act just as He would.

7. You must not rest while there is any unrepented, unconfessed sin between your soul and Him. You must keep a clear medium. I will explain what I mean. You have seen two friends who have been for a long time agreed, and have taken sweet counsel together, but by and by a little difference creeps in between them--a little mist begins to obscure the medium, and now, when they meet, you will begin to see it in the eye and countenance; there is a little flutter in their manner; and unless it be immediately removed, it will increase, until, finally, they will turn their backs upon each other. So with a husband and wife; how careful should they be to keep a clear medium of mental intercourse. Suppose a husband has grieved his wife. Now, if he is a man of sensibility, he cannot be at ease; he goes to pray, he remembers the wound which he has inflicted, he can pray no further; he rises from his knees, and goes and confesses to his wife the injury he has done her. The cloud is now removed from the medium, and he is happy. So with the Christian. If he has grieved Christ, and injured his tender feelings, he can have no farther communion with Him, until he has repented, and confessed his faults, and the tender breathings of mutual love are again restored.

8. You must cease from all self-dependence. So long as you depend on yourself, you will see no need of putting on Christ.

9. You must avail yourself of his exceeding great and precious promises. You must realize what the promises were given for; and that they were given for you personally. The Apostle Peter says--"Whereby are given unto us, exceeding great and precious promises, that, by these we might be partakers of the divine nature; having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." The design of the promises, then, is, to beget in us a universal likeness to the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, a promise is good for nothing unless it be fulfilled. Ten thousand promises, of such a character, would be of no more use, than a book of checks given to a poor man, by Mr. Astor, which he carries about closed up, and never uses.

IV. Obligation to obey this command is universal.

1. By this, it is not intended, that all are to do exactly the same things which Christ did, for no one, is, in all respects, in the same circumstances. As circumstances vary, outward duties differ. Christ practiced celibacy; and, in the circumstances in which He was placed, this was his duty. But it never could be the duty of mankind, generally, to imitate Him in this particular, and in many other things.

2. But it is intended that all are bound to do as He did, so far, as their circumstances are the same, that they are to do what they suppose He would do, if He were in their circumstances: For example; if He were a father, a merchant, a mechanic, a lawyer, or a citizen. In early life He was a carpenter, and labored with his father at his trade. Let a carpenter ask these questions,--"What sort of a carpenter was Jesus Christ? How honest was He? How did He do his work? How did He associate, and converse with his fellow workmen?" Now just that, which you suppose Him to be, you are to be. Suppose the Lord Jesus Christ were a merchant, upon what principles would He conduct his business? Or, if He were a physician, how would He practice? Would He avoid visiting the poor, and seek to engross a practice among the rich?

3. You are to consider, how He would act in your circumstances, and do, as you think He would. How important for a minister of the gospel, to inquire what kind of a pastor Christ would be if He were in his circumstances; and so with every other man, for the same reason. If Christ were a physician, what would He do? Would He try to reject the custom of the poor, and obtain that of the rich? Would He say, when a poor man came soliciting his aid, I shall not get much money for this; therefore, I do not care whether I attend to it or not. Now, beloved brethren, in this congregation, who are physicians, are you such as you think Christ would be, taking into the account the difference of circumstances? So, you may take any other occupation, even the lowest; for none that is honest, is too low to forbid the supposition, of his being in similar circumstances. It was with a design to illustrate this, that He washed his disciples' feet. In the East they wear sandals, which expose their feet to the hot sands, and it was customary for the lowest servant of the house to wait at the door with water, to wash the feet of visitors. Now the Savior did this, to inculcate the lesson of lowliness of heart, and to show the spirit with which all should perform the duties of life. Whatever may be your condition, whatever you suppose Christ would be in your place, just that, you ought to be. And it is an important question, for each one to ask, "Would Christ pursue my calling, if placed in my circumstances, and would He pursue it as I do?"

4. That it is a universal duty to put on Christ, is evident from the following facts--that it is just right--that all can do it by his grace--that universal reason demands it--that it is essential to the good of the universe, and that sinners are as really commanded to do it, as saints are.

V. Obedience to the requirement of this text, is naturally indispensable to salvation.

1. By this, it is not intended, that no one can be saved who has not always done this.
2. But, so far as their knowledge extends, they are to put Him on, and live devoted to the same end.

(1.) Because every thing short of this is sin.

(2.) Nothing short of intending to be, or do, what He would be, or do, with our light, and in our circumstances, can be acceptable to God.--'Ye cannot serve God and mammon.' What does this mean? Not that ye cannot serve God at one time, and mammon at another; but that you must be entirely devoted either to one, or the other, and cannot serve both at the same time.

(3.) Benevolence, is a unit, and will always manifest itself alike in all, so far as their circumstances are similar.

(4.) Christ was no more than virtuous, and you must be no less, or you cannot be saved. I have often been astonished, that people talk as if Christ did something more than his duty, and performed works of supererogation, as if such a thing were possible. Duty, is what benevolence requires. Now, if Christ should do more than benevolence requires, it could not be benevolence, nor duty, and consequently, not virtue. I would ask, was God in making the Atonement, any more benevolent than He ought to be? If so, He was not virtuous in it. The truth is, people are in the dark on this subject. No being in the universe can perform works of supererogation; for every one, is required to do his whole duty. Christ was perfectly benevolent, and this was his duty; and so must you be if you put Him on.

(5.) You must be like Him, or you never can be with Him.

VI. Some of the consequences of obeying this requirement.

And here, I wish to be exceedingly candid, and keep nothing back. I have often marked how much the Lord Jesus Christ differed from many who set themselves up as reformers. He would often press his hearers, till almost all of them would forsake Him. Once, all left Him but his twelve disciples, and He turned to them and said, 'Will ye also go away?' Implying that he would rather lose them than to keep back the truth. And we must not preach a false Christ, or you will have the livery of heaven, and the temper of the world.

1. The first consequence I mention, is, you will have much opposition. You can expect no better usage than Christ received. 'It is enough for the servant that he be as his master.'
2. You may expect great trials. This is the inheritance of all who will live godly in Christ Jesus. Look at Paul. While he was a Pharisee, he went on smoothly. The gales of popular favor swelled his sails. But when he became the preacher of the cross, ah! then he knew what it was to go against wind and tide.
3. Men will accuse you of having a bad spirit. They have always brought this charge against the true followers of Christ, and especially against Christ Himself. He said so much about their teachers, creeds, and traditions, and rebuked them so plainly, that they finally tried, and executed him as a blasphemer.
4. You will need great meekness, and at the same time great decision of character. Without both of these qualities, you cannot endure the shock of a world arrayed against you.
5. You will subject yourself to much misapprehension. Men will not understand you. Many wonder, why Christians are so misunderstood. But it is not at all wonderful. Who was ever more misunderstood than

Jesus Christ? The simple fact is, a selfish mind does not understand the principle upon which a true Christian acts.

6. If you are misunderstood, you will of course, be misrepresented. This you must expect.

7. It will subject you to the loss of many friends. They will think you are ultra, extravagant, and carrying matters too far. And every new step you take, you will see an additional falling off. They will walk no more with you. But all the consequences are not evil. For,

8. You will inherit his peace of mind; and this is worth more than all the world can give. You will sleep just as sweetly, eat with just as much relish, and enjoy the tranquil hours just as really, as if you had all the world's favor. Persons often wonder, whether such are not unhappy. I answer, nay. They are the only persons who know what true happiness is.

9. His joy will be fulfilled in you. This is his promise; and his true followers sympathize with Him in all the joys He had.

10. You will share his glory in being the representative of the true God. 'And the glory which Thou gavest me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that Thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as Thou hast loved me.' Christ was sent to reveal the true character of God. He took the law which lay on tables of stone, and acted it out; thus showing mankind just what God was. Without such a manifestation, as was thus made of his true character, men must have always remained in ignorance. What is God? A glorious, infinite, and invisible Spirit, lying back in the bosom of eternity, where no eye can reach. What finite mind could comprehend Him? He must reveal Himself; and to this end, He concentrated his glory in Christ, and sent Him forth among mankind. Every one, then, who puts on the Lord Jesus Christ, will share this glory with Him, of making known to the world the true character of God.

11. You will be able to say, with Paul, 'For me to live, is Christ.' The Apostle seems to have had this idea in his mind, that Christ lived his life over again in him. So it will be with you. Christ renews his life in his true followers.

12. You will be able to say from your own consciousness, as John says,--'Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.'

13. You will be happy in the highest degree of which you are capable in this life. And you will be no less useful, than you are happy.

VII. Consequences of disobeying this requirement.

1. If you are a professor of religion, you will be a hypocrite, and people will know it. There are, perhaps, some, who are successful in keeping on the mask. But most, betray themselves sooner or later, and are known in their true character.

2. You will render peace of mind impossible.

3. You will render yourself justly despicable. All love to see men live up to their profession, and naturally cry out against hypocrisy.

4. You will ruin your own soul, and do the most you can to ruin others.

5. You will bring upon yourself the endless execration of all beings in the Universe, both good and bad.

REMARKS.

1. Inconsistent professors sometimes gain the hollow applause of the unthinking, and ungodly.

2. But they never gain the solid respect, of any class, for any considerable time. Instead of this, they really lose it. For as soon as their true character appears, mankind cannot but condemn and abhor it. Their inward want of confidence in such professors, is often exhibited in a trying hour. A fact related in my hearing by a Methodist minister, made a deep impression on my mind. A wealthy man in the South, who had sat under the preaching of a worldly minister, was taken sick, and about to die. His friends asked him, if they should send for his minister. He said, no, I do not want him now; we have been together at the horse-race. They urged him to send for somebody, and mentioned several. But he rejected them all; and at last told them to call in Tom, one of his colored men; for, said he, I have often heard him pray alone. Tom came, laid his little hat at the door, and inquired what his master wanted. Said the dying man, "Tom, do you pray?" "Yes, master,--in my weak way." "Can you pray for your dying master?" "I'll try," he repeated. "Come here, then, and pray for me." And Tom drew near, and poured out his soul to God for the dying man. Ah! the master knew, in his inmost soul, that his minister could not pray. Poor Tom, was the man to pray.

3. The lives of many professors, are a most terrible burlesque on Christianity. Satan, it would seem, has pushed these into the Church to disgrace it. Persons who have a strong sense of the ridiculous, are often tempted to laugh at the absurd notions of religion which some manifest. They never seem to think of asking how Christ would do. I have sometimes seen servants, in families where they were called to family worship, come in cowering, and get behind the door, altogether away from the family circle. I wonder if they think it will be so in heaven. In some families I know, it is not their wish, but the choice of the servant, and of course they are not to blame. Since I have been here I have seen persons take up their hats and leave the house, when they see the colored people sitting among the whites. I wonder if such people would do so in heaven. Do let me ask, is not this the direct opposite of the spirit of Christ? How would Christ treat the poor slaves, and the colored people, if He were in this country?

4. See the importance of always bearing in mind the person whom you have undertaken to represent, and the part you are expected to act. For example; all can see that a minister in the pulpit, and every where, should bear this in mind, and so he should; but no more, really, than any other Christian should in his vocation.

5. It becomes us to inquire, whether we have so represented Christ as to give those around us the true idea of religion. Suppose a minister should never ask himself, what idea of religion his people get from him. It is easy to see that he would not be able to convey a very definite idea of it to his people. So every professor should do. And now beloved, do you live so as to make the impression, that religion is disinterested benevolence? Who would get that idea from you? Said a man not long since, if religion is benevolence, I know of but one man in our church who seems to be religious. How many do you know in this City? Nothing else is religion--Do you live so? Do I? If not what will become of our souls?

6. Those who do not put on Christ, are the worst kind of heretics. There is no heresy so bad as a false profession.

7. Inconsistent professors are the greatest curse to the world, that there is in it.

8. Professors who have not put on Christ should confess to those around them and instantly reform. Confess to your wife, your children, your church, your neighbors. Will you do it?

9. Sinners are altogether without excuse, and are as much bound to put on Christ as professors.

10. Unless every one of us, in his calling, fully intends to put on Christ, and keep Him on, we are in the way to hell. If you are not what you think Christ would be in your calling, you are not a Christian. How different is this from the common religion. All that we see is pride, and starch, and fashion, and death. Oh! brethren, let us put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and 'make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof.'

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