

# Victory Over the Flesh

by J. Sidlow Baxter

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*To live in victory over the flesh, we must continually put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh by starving it with neglect and turning away from it.*

**Duration:** 52:27

**Scripture:** Romans 13:14, Galatians 5:16, Ephesians 6:11

**Topics:** "Flesh", "Victory Over Sin", "Walking In The Spirit"

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## Description

J. Sidlow Baxter emphasizes the necessity of living in victory over the flesh by putting on the Lord Jesus Christ and avoiding provisions for sinful desires. He explains that the 'flesh' refers to our inherent sinful tendencies, which cannot be eradicated but can be managed through the Holy Spirit's guidance. Baxter encourages believers to continually yield to the Holy Spirit, walk step by step with Him, and focus on Jesus to overcome temptations. He highlights that true victory comes not from self-repression but from a renewed nature that desires holiness. The sermon concludes with practical steps for maintaining this victorious life in Christ.

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## Transcript

My dear friends, oh dear, it sounds awful to me, but is it all right for you? This isn't my normal voice at all. However, I won't say any more about it, perhaps I'm saying too much. Listen friends, each morning this week so far, I have brought you what might properly be described as a thoroughgoing Bible study.

For a change, this morning I shall limit myself to two texts. Will you kindly turn to the first of them? In Paul's epistle to the Romans, chapter 13, and the last verse in the chapter, that is verse 14. Romans chapter 13, verse 14.

But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts or desires thereof. Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof. My subject in this present address is one of deepest concern to every Christian believer.

That subject is how to live in victory over the flesh. Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof. Now, of course, it is quite plain that when Paul writes in this text, make not provision for the flesh, he is using that phrase, the flesh, in a recondite or figurative way to indicate some serious moral proclivity or predisposition to sin which exists in our human nature.

For he exhorts us not to fulfill the lusts of the flesh. What, then, does Paul mean by the flesh? Well, now, the Greek word translated as flesh is *sart*, in English lettering s-a-r-t, *sart*. That word occurs 91 times in Paul's epistles, if we include Hebrews as Pauline.

Those 91 occurrences break down as follows. One, *sart* is used 37 times of the physical body. Two, it is used 25 times of humanity or that which is human.

Three, it is used 27 times in a figurative way, meaning an hereditary sin bias in our human nature. And finally, he, Paul, uses the word twice in what I can only call a kind of borderline way. Now, of course, dear friends, I cannot here take you through all those 27 texts where the phrase, the flesh, is used figuratively of the hereditary sin bent in our moral nature.

But I can report to you the result of my own careful scrutiny of all the 27. By the flesh, Paul means our inborn animal or physical and selfish urges or propensities. Not a very happy phrase, but I'll say it again.

He means our inborn animal and selfish urges or propensities. Now, these animal and selfish propensities, which create in you and me our predisposition to sin, we have inherited from our human predecessors along with all the higher and nobler impulses of our total humanhood. Listen, dear fellow believers, we must never think that heredity only brings us bad things.

All the lovely things in our human life and experience come to us by the same channel of heredity. Now, if you look through all those places where Paul uses that expression, the flesh, figuratively of this moral evil in our nature, you may quickly verify for your own self that in each case you can accurately substitute for that phrase, the flesh, animal, and selfish propensities. That is the common denominator which fits them all.

Now, Mr. Chairman and friends, I submit to you this morning it is exceedingly important to grasp that, because it tells us at once that this innate perversity or hereditary sin-proneness must not be thought of as a kind of hard core inside us, or as some kind of a malignant growth which can be excised by spiritual surgery, or as a so-called old nature which can be eradicated, or as a parasite which can be ripped out from the fibers of our moral being, or as a kind of ugly old man who can be bound and gagged or ejected from our inner being like a troublesome lodger. No, no, no. By the flesh, Paul means a corruption in our nature which is more accurately comparable to blight spread throughout a tree, or to a disseminated sclerosis through the human physical organism, or to a toxemia throughout the bloodstream.

It is not something concentrated inside us which can be treated separately and locally. In a word, it is not something which can in any way be treated in lump form. It is an inhering condition coextensive with the mind itself.

And, thank God, that condition which we have all hereditarily received, that condition can be remedially dealt with by the deeper spiritual provisions which are yours and mine in Christ, that is, by the inward supernatural therapy of the Holy Spirit. Well now, with that clearly in mind, I invite you to look at the advice given to us in our text. Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof.

You will observe as quickly as I do that the apostolic counsel here is twofold. The first part of it is positive, something we are to do. The second part of it is negative, something we are not to do.

The positive part is put on the Lord Jesus Christ. The negative part is don't make provision for the flesh. So look first at the positive, afterwards at the negative.

This is the positive, put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ. What then did Paul mean when he said put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ? Well his first reference, beyond any puradventure, is to our conversion. We know that from a parallel reference in Galatians chapter 3 verse 27, where Paul says, for as many of you as were baptized into Christ did thereby put on Christ.

So without any possibility of doubt, the primary reference here is to our conversion, our regeneration. At our conversion we did put on the Lord Jesus Christ. But I'm sure you will agree with me in this, there are subsidiary ways in which we are to put on the Lord Jesus Christ again and again and again, subsequently to our conversion.

Probably many of you are like me in this, that every morning when I wake my first thought is of my precious, glorious, adorable Savior, and I commence each day by putting him on again. I say to him, Lord Jesus, at the beginning of this new day I take thee as my wisdom, as my grace, as my patience, as my guidance, etc., etc. You do the same, don't you? I hope you do.

And then of course we are to put on the Lord Jesus Christ for every new exigency of our pilgrim life, for every new burden to be borne, and every new trial to be endured, and every new piece of Christian service to be attempted. We need to put Jesus on again and again and again, don't we? And if you and I are to have victory over the flesh, that is the first thing. We must continually put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I am human enough and compassionate enough to be suspecting that some of you, perhaps some of you younger folks here this morning, will be inwardly saying, yes, very well, Dr. Baxter, but I have a problem you haven't touched. I think I do what you're telling us we have to do. At least I try to do it, but despite all my putting on of the Lord Jesus Christ, something seems to go wretchedly wrong.

Can you give me any advice concerning that? Well, at any rate, you are reminding me of something which I now will tell you. It was my privilege to be trained for the Christian ministry in that famous institution in London, England, Spurgeon's Theological College. It was founded, of course, by that incomparable prince of preachers, the late, famous Charles Adams Spurgeon.

Now in the four-year course at Spurgeon's College, every student has to preach either once or twice a spontaneous, unpremeditated sermon on a subject, a topic or a text, which is handed to him on a folded slip of paper. And you are to expatiate on the text or the subject for a minimum of ten minutes. And let me tell you, in some of those unpremeditated perorations, I heard some of the wildest, weirdest, unforgettable things I ever heard.

But besides having to do that once or twice, either once or twice, usually twice, every student has to preach a prepared discourse in the presence of the principal and the professors and the Philistines. I did it twice. And let me tell you, when you've gone through that ordeal, you're never afraid of the Great Tribulation again.

Now I'm thinking of something that took place when the glorious Charles Adams Spurgeon himself was alive and was the principal of the college. One morning, it was sermon class time, and the preacher was a very self-confident, budding, young orator who thought he was predestinated to be the modern Demosthenes. He really wanted to show off in the presence of Spurgeon and the faculty.

His subject was the Christian in complete armor. And of course, you won't need me to tell you, his passage was Ephesians 6, put on the armor of God. Oh, and talk about youthful oratory and eloquence.

You never heard the likes of it. He had a great old time. The angels in heaven must have wondered at his wisdom.

And so graphically did he describe putting on the armor. As he put on the different parts, you could almost hear the metallic clank, clank, clank of the armor, until at last he got it all on. And then he said, and now we have put on the whole armor of God, and now where's the devil? And Spurgeon, cupping his hand to his mouth, whispered, brother, he's inside the armor.

Has that pleasant little anecdote somehow rung a bell in your unhappy experience? And are you saying, oh Mr. Preacher, that's my problem. I put on the armor, but when I've done so, somehow there's something wrong inside the armor. Well now, don't you see, that's where the negative part of this apostolic counsel comes into play.

Make not provision for the flesh. Just about the time that the 19th century was giving place to the 20th, a party of medical experts left the port of Liverpool in Lancashire, England, on an exploration of the Middle East and certain other places, to investigate into the cause or causes of malaria. Now of course, everybody in these days knows that malaria is caused by the malarial germ or microbe, but it was never known until that expedition about the beginning of our 20th century.

And when those medical men discovered that malaria is caused by that wicked little wretch, the malarial microbe, they began to exert all their knowledge and inquiry to discover what the malarial germ feeds on. What is its fructifying environment? The argument being, if we can separate it from what it feeds on, if we can divorce it from its fructifying environment, the nasty little thing may die. Now the Apostle Paul was not only a supernaturally inspired theologian, he was a wonderfully penetrative psychologist.

And I think he has something of that in his thought when he says, make not provision for the flesh. Don't fight it so much as starve it, kill it by neglect. Don't give it food to feed on.

Don't give it a germinating environment. Ignore it. Turn away from it.

Starve it to death. Make not provision for the flesh. Some years ago, I was holding meetings in a certain city down in USA, and I had the privilege of staying with a lawyer and his wife.

And what a fine man he is. And what a delightful wife she is. But I hadn't been in that home for more than two or three days before I found that that poor woman was going haggard with a fearful bondage in her life.

She gave you the impression of carrying around an invisible ghost, and I could see that it was making her nervous system fearfully upset. As we got to know one another a little better, one morning she confided to me what her trouble was. I won't explain to you the nature of it, but I want to tell you this.

She had been in the grip of that horrible thing for nigh on 20 years. And she said to me, oh Dr. Baxter, I am at my wits end. I have the most wonderful husband, and he's so understanding and so patient, but I feel sorry for him.

It's been, it's been an awful trial for him through these years of our married life, and I don't know what to do. She said, do you know, I prayed and prayed and prayed about it. I've spent all nights of prayer praying about this thing, praying against it.

I pleaded with God. I've struggled. I've fought it.

I've thought of every conceivable way of holding it down. And you know, I got a concordance, and I went right through the Bible from Genesis to Malachi and Matthew to the Apocalypse. I've looked up and I've studied every reference in the Bible to this thing, and I've read every book I could ever find on it.

And when we've had outstanding ministers here, if I thought there were men who were knowledgeable in the deeper things of the Christian life, I've had consultations with them about it. And she said, I have friends in the city here who are joining me in prayer. Listen friends, are you thinking anything? Maybe some of you are.

As I listened, I could see the awful fallacy in her thinking. And when an opportunity came, I said, my dear girl, you're committing an awful blunder. Don't you see, all the time you're praying, praying, praying, praying about this thing, you're concentrating the mind on it.

You're giving it an exaggerated prominence in your mind. You're giving it food to feed on. All the time you're studying through the Bible on it.

All the time you're talking to ministers about it. All the time you're fighting and struggling to overcome it. The whole bent of your being is concentrated on it.

You're giving it all it wants to grow and grow and grow. Are you following? Say yes. Now please don't misunderstand, I would be the last man ever to come to BBI and say one word to lessen anybody's praying.

We're all needing to pray more. But shall I remind you that there was a time in the life of Moses when God said to him, speak no more to me about this thing. It was time for something other than prayer or in addition to prayer.

I was sitting in a railway compartment not so long ago reading a book on psychology. I was sitting in a railway compartment not so long ago reading a book on psychology. And there was a sentence in that book which just riveted itself in my mind.

It said this, it is psychologically demonstrable that we gradually grow like that at which we most continually look. I'll say that again. It is psychologically demonstrable that we gradually grow like that at which we most continually look.

I couldn't help thinking of the hours and hours and hours and days and weeks and months in the aggregate that our young people today sit looking at the wretched stuff, speaking in general, that comes through the television. And those psychologists who tell us that all this has no effect upon our young folks, I call them crackpots. I spoke to two young fellows in meetings of mine in a northern city in the USA.

They had stolen large amounts of money. They'd done very naughty things. They'd had a great old time with the money they'd stolen.

Then they were chased by the police and got down to Mexico. Later they were arrested and brought home for trial. And there they were in my meeting.

And when I got to know them, I asked them, what made you guys do this? And one of them at once, speaking for both of them, said, we saw it on television. And if two will say so, there are a million who, if they don't say so, just as much take their cue from what they see. It is psychologically demonstrable that we gradually grow like that at which we most continually look.

Do you know, in Geneva, a certain photographic society took hundreds of photographs, and it was able to demonstrate that married couples who have really married because they were deeply in love, and have lived deeply loving each other for 25, 30 years or more, they become even physiognomically more like each other than brothers and sisters of the same family. We gradually grow like that at which we most continually look. That's why I'm so good looking.

And come to think of it, my precious ethyl isn't so bad either. Now, I have a feeling there's some friend here this morning, and you're making just that blunder. You've got your mind on that evil thing, you're praying about it, you're fighting against it, you're trying to stamp on it, the whole of your mind is occupied with it, you'll never get victory that way.

Starve it with neglect, turn your face away from it. I know this isn't a five minute cure, and if you're thinking you can have a crisis that will settle it all, I'm very sorry to disillusion you, but it doesn't come that way. Now, I'm just as human as you are, and I have been putting this now into practice for 40 years, and it works.

Make not provision for the flesh. Soon after my conversion, I developed a great fondness for the writings of the early Methodists. My ethyl and I, both of us, were brought up Methodist.

It was only a while after that, that we took a plunge and became Baptists. But, oh, did you think I was getting into deep waters then? But, in my early Christian days, I was very fond of the writings of the early Methodists. And you know, I've read all through the seven volumes written by John Fletcher of Medley.

And John Fletcher of Medley was the man of whom John Wesley said, he is the holiest man in Britain. And John Wesley wasn't fond of flinging mere superficial encomiums about. When he said a thing like that, there was deep reason for it.

John Fletcher of Medley is the holiest man in England. I've been in John Fletcher's study, and they said he spent so much time in prayer that the paper on the wall gradually became discolored with the falling of his breath upon it. Well, there's a sentence in John Fletcher's writing which has lived with me and has meant more to me than I could ever tell you, dear young folks.

It's this. John Fletcher says, live looking at him. That's all, but how tremendous.

Live looking at him. You younger men and women, you've got the problems that belong to full-blooded youth. And I'm recommending you this.

If you have problems with the flesh, develop the habit, you can do if you will, develop the habit of living looking at Jesus. Don't strain to do it, and don't grumble at yourself if you keep failing. Have sympathy with yourself, but keep practicing it.

Live with your mind looking at him, and I'll tell you why. Whatever sinful thing you can think of, you will find in Jesus the exquisitely perfect opposite of it. And if there's some nagging, gnawing, evil thing that's pestering you and dragging you down and defeating you all the time, keep feasting your mind upon Jesus.

In him you'll see the opposite of that. Turn your mind away from that evil, ugly thing, and keep feeding your mind with him. And you'll find, as I've found, that the ugly things will lose their grip and lose their power, and they'll begin to fall away.

Yes they will. I see I have a little time left. I'm determined this morning not to go over the time.

At least I think I'm determined. But now at this point, let me turn you to the second of my two texts. The epistle of Paul to the Galatians chapter 5 and verse 16.

Galatians chapter 5 verse 16. Have you got it? I'll wait. Galatians 5 verse 16.

Here it is. This I say then, walk in the spirit and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. Now this text crowns the other, walk in the spirit and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

Now here we have two things. First, an exhortation, walk in the spirit. And two, an assurance that if we do walk in the spirit, we shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

That raises two questions. A, what is it to walk in the spirit? And B, how does it release us from bondage to the flesh? Very well, look first at the exhortation here. Walk in the spirit.

I can't help noticing in the Greek that the noun is in the dative case. And we would do better to translate it perhaps, walk by the spirit. Now a walk is a reiterated first step.

A walk is a continuity of steps. Therefore to walk by the spirit means to keep step with the spirit. That indeed is the very picture here.

It means living step by step, step by step, step by step with the Holy Spirit. And it is a captivating picture of the Christian life. It means that the Holy Spirit is always with us, and better still, within us, waiting and wanting to guide us, not only in a general indefinite way, but in the step by step incidentals which together make up our daily walk.

It is a lovely picture that, isn't it? Fancy living our Christian life like that. Step by step, heartbeat by heartbeat, thought by thought, minute by minute, step by step, with this indwelling, loving, gracious, persevering, sympathetic, kind, understanding Holy Spirit. Walk step by step with the spirit.

Well somebody says, it is a lovely picture, but how do we do that? Well I think I can tell you that. I hope it won't sound complicated. This walking step by step with the Holy Spirit means three things.

One, it means of course a continual yieldedness to him. And two, that continual yieldedness to him develops in us a continuous sensitivity to him. And three, that yieldedness and sensitivity uh, brings to us, thirdly, a continual guidedness by him.

And listen dear brothers and sisters, the most wonderful experience this side of heaven is to live a God guided life. And not simply guidance for what we think are the big things of life, but this guidedness day after day, and minute after minute. Oh there's a wonderful thrill about this walking in the Spirit.

You've got those three words haven't you? There must be that, that glad-hearted, natural, complete, yieldedness to him. And uh, if you make, if you and I make that that uh, surrender to him, not in an excited way, but thoughtfully and meaningfully, if we yield ourselves to him, you will find as I have found, that as you maintain that yieldedness, there will develop a sensitivity to him. And then coming with that sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, you'll find that he guides you, all the time.

Amid the busy absorptions of our usual workdays, we cannot always be directly thinking of the Holy Spirit, we cannot always be directly conscious of the Holy Spirit in the upper stratum of the mind, but we can carry an unbroken, subconscious awareness of him. A subconscious of him, which again and again, when the mind is free from upper absorptions, a subconsciousness which again and again, instantaneously rises to the higher level of full consciousness, bringing inward guidance for each recurring need of it. Well, that's what it means to walk step by step with the Spirit.

And finally, look at the assurance. And ye shall not fulfill the desires of the flesh. How does this walking in the Spirit bring that about? It does it in two principal ways.

One, in the really yielded believer, it refines the mind. It refines the mind in all its native impulses, and desires, and spontaneous urges. It refines the mind in its perception of the ugliness of sin, amid the most alluring, golden-looking temptation.

Oh, younger men and women here, and you older folks, don't think I'm forgetting you, because I am one of you, but I used to be young, although you might not think it. And I can't help thinking about the younger folks, because I'm so anxious they shall learn some of this while they are still young. I want that you get hold of this.

The Holy Spirit can and will refine your mind. He will refine it and renew it in the very thought springs of your mind. He will renew the very impulses of your nature.

Now, don't you see, the real secret of Christian victory isn't just repression, repression, repression, fight, fight, fight. It's having a nature that's renewed, so that spontaneously we love the things that are holy, and we choose the things that are holy, and we think the things that are holy. Well, that's the first way that walking in the Spirit releases us from bondage to the flesh.

It refines, and renews, and chastens, and uplifts the mind. And the second way is, when we are really walking step by step with the Spirit, and the Holy Spirit has unobstructed opportunity within us, in every sudden emergency, the Holy Spirit infuses an explosive power. Oh, haven't I proved that again and again.

When you're really walking in the Spirit, and temptation comes, with sudden temptation there's that sudden infusion of an expulsive power against sin. The Holy Spirit will never fight your battles for you, or else he could never develop the character that he wants to do. The Holy Spirit will never be a substitute for your own will, but the Holy Spirit comes to empower that will of yours.

He comes to refine that nature of yours, and the happy byproduct of that is that there's a new power to conquer temptation. I suppose the classic Old Testament illustration of that is Joseph. You know how Joseph was continually subjected to a very delicate, delicate kind of temptation by a beautiful woman, and eventually it came to a head, and suddenly Joseph found himself in the presence of powerful temptation.

Joseph was a man. He was a young man. He was a handsome young man, and this is how he conquered.

He said, how can I do this thing and sin against God? No. Now I connect that with what John says. He says, he that is begotten of God cannot sin because his seed remaineth in him.

The new birth, the new life. And John doesn't mean that we Christians can't sin because now there's the mental and the physical impossibility of sinning. He means that it becomes morally, morally intolerable.

Now that's how it was with Joseph. However attracted he might have been physically, it was morally intolerable. And when you and I are walking in the Spirit, he makes compromise with sin morally intolerable.

We hate sin, and he gives us the power to reject it. Well, so far as I know, I'm about through. Let me have a look, see what I haven't told you.

What I am anxious to get over this morning is that this is victory not by self-repression or by any surgical removal of a suppositionary old nature inside us, but a renewal unto holiness of what you and I basically are. And the big truth I want you to get hold of is that you and I may be so inwardly renewed and refined that all the higher within us has continually the upper hand over all the lower. Now a closing word.

Probably there may be some in our company asking, how do I actually enter this experience? In reply, let me say it is not something which can happen all at once. When Columbus discovered America, he could not possess it all at once. But he could, and did, enter it by a single act.

Or coming back to the wording of our text, we cannot walk this walk with the Spirit all at once. But we can at once take the first step into it. And what is that first step? It is our soul fully yielding to him that our will becomes one with his.

You know we sometimes think that our will is to be lost in his. But many expressions in our hymns are not exactly scriptural. The Holy Spirit doesn't want you and me to lose our will in his.

He wants that our will shall voluntarily become one with his. The Lord never comes to destroy our will. He comes to strengthen our will.

He only comes to destroy self-will. That's a very different thing. But your will and mine are to become one with his, and that's what happens when we really give ourselves to him.

That's where the blessing begins. And then that decisive crisis develops into a progress of continued yielding, and continued sanctification, and continued victory. And from that point onwards, this is the secret of living on the high victory level.

One, as you remain continually yielded to the Holy Spirit, believe that he continually fills you. Two, trust him in his own way to make that filling real within your consciousness. Three, put on the Lord Jesus afresh each day, and for each new vicissitude, as your all-sufficiency.

Four, keep developing the habit of looking away from the flesh, and living with your inner vision turned on him. Five, and finally, through regular seasons of daily secret prayer, keep sensitive each hour to the Spirit's guidance. Oh, Mr. Chairman and friends, as we all know, it's much simpler than it sounds when you try to explain it.

Really, it is very simple. And I'm hoping that some of us may learn, or perhaps some of us are needing to learn afresh, these precious truths. Walk step by step with the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the

flesh.

Oh, friends, we have a dear Savior, don't we? We do, and we all want to be our best for him. And I believe this is the secret, this is the way. Shall we pray?

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