

Putting on Christ (7): fulfilling the lusts of the flesh Hymns 270, Beautiful Savior/Come People, 390

We come this morning for the seventh time to Romans 13:14, and the third time to Paul's negative exhortation (make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts). Thus far we've answered two questions: What is meant by the Flesh? What is meant by not making provision for the flesh? This brings us to our final question: What is meant by fulfilling the lusts of the flesh?

- I. What are the Lusts of the Flesh?
- II. What is it to Fulfill the Lusts of the Flesh?
- III. Concluding Thoughts

I. What are the Lusts of the Flesh?

1. The Greek word rendered "lusts" literally means "desires" "cravings" "longings" or "lusts"—these can be good or bad desires.
2. For example, the same word is used of our Savior in Lk.22:15—"With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer."
3. It's also used of Paul in Phil.1:23—"I have a desire to depart and be with Christ"—he longed or craved to be with Christ.
4. Thus, the word is a generic or broad word that refers to any strong desire, craving, or longing of the soul.
5. The context determines whether the desires are holy or sinful—if the desires are from Christ, they're holy, if from our flesh they're unholy.
6. Most of the time, the NT uses this word to describe the evil and wicked lusts, cravings, and desires of the flesh.
7. Thus, Scripture speaks of "the lusts of the flesh" "ungodly and worldly lusts" "deceitful lusts" "evil desires" "foolish and hurtful lusts" "the lusts of uncleanness" and "the lusts of men."
8. This is how our text uses this word—"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts."
9. These are the desires or cravings of the flesh—and if you remember, the flesh is always and only evil.
10. Thus, by desires of the flesh are meant all evil desires (and not merely sexual desires)—desires that contradict the holy law of God.
11. (1) Desires for evil—the flesh desires or longs for things that are forbidden by God and His holy law.
12. Our flesh desires, craves, or longs for thoughts and actions that violate God's law—fear, worry, lies, deceit, and immorality.
13. (2) Desires against good—the flesh not only lusts for sin, but it also lusts against the motions for good.
14. Gal.5:17—"For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish."
15. Thus, the flesh not only seeks to promote sin and evil, but it actively opposes every good and holy desire.

II. What is it to Fulfill the Lusts of the Flesh?

1. As I've wrestled with this text this past week, I decided the best way to answer this question is by asking three additional questions (are the lusts of the flesh sinful, do all temptations originate from the flesh, and how do you know if you've fulfilled the lust of the flesh).

2. (1) Are the lusts of the flesh themselves sinful? Here I have to remind you of the distinction I mentioned last week between original and actual sin.
3. (a) Original sin—this refers to that principle of evil that remains in every Christian called the flesh which has desires.
4. These desires, as I've already said, are always sinful—the flesh craves sinful things and opposes good things.
5. Thus, just as the flesh either reigns or remains, so too original sin either reigns or remains (they are the same thing).
6. (b) Actual sin—this refers to thoughts or actions whereby we fulfill the sinful lusts or desires of the flesh.
7. Thus, the question I am raising here is this—are the lusts, desires, or suggestions of the flesh themselves sinful?
8. And the simple answer is, yes! The lusts, desires, and suggestions of the flesh are in themselves sinful!
9. For example, last week I used an illustration of my wife and I—she has said something to me offensive.
10. So I go up to my study and sit at my desk—my flesh begins to entice me with its evil and corrupt desires.
11. Who does this woman think she is? She has no right to speak to me in that way! I should get even with her!
12. These are the desires, cravings, and longings of the flesh—and yes, they are in and of themselves sinful!
13. It's always sinful to tempt or entice someone to sin—and that's true, even if it's ourselves we are tempting.
14. And yet, while these desires to sin are in themselves sinful, it's not actual sin until I fulfill that desire.
15. Let me put it like this—are the desires in me to sin in themselves sinful, yes; but it's far worse to fulfill these desires.
16. Thus, go back to my illustration—I'm sitting upstairs in my study being enticed to sin against my wife.
17. And while that's in itself sinful, it's far worse to gratify those lusts, by returning downstairs to yell at her.
18. And it's a common temptation of our enemy to suggest—because we've already thought about fulfilling the desire, why not go ahead and fulfill it.
19. But my point here is to underscore the fact—the lusts of the flesh are in themselves sinful (even if we never fulfill them).
20. Matt.5:28—"But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."
21. Sinful lusts or desires in the soul are sin; or, let me put this another way—the desire to sin is itself sin.
22. And again, let me clarify—while the desire to sin is sin, it's far worse to act on that desire and fulfill it.
23. For example, earlier in the same chapter our Savior said something similar with regards to the sixth commandment.
24. Matt.5:22—"Whoever is angry with his brother without a cause is guilty of murder"—to desire to kill is sinful, but actual murder is worse.
25. How foolish would it be to think like this—because I have already wanted to kill someone, then what's the difference if I actually kill them.

26. Well, in one sense, the desire to murder and actual murder are the same—they are made of the same stuff.
27. And yet, only a fool would suggest, that the desire to murder and actual murder are the same in every way.
28. Lk.17:1—"Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come"—apply this verse to our flesh.
29. If it's sinful to tempt others to sin, then it's sinful to tempt ourselves to sin—lusts of the flesh are sinful.
30. (2) Do all temptations originate from the flesh? The answer to this question is simply, no. Not all temptations originate from the flesh.
31. A temptation can originate from within or without—within refers to our flesh and without to Satan and the world.
32. Thus, Eph.6:16 speaks of "the fiery darts of the wicked one"—these refer to the fiery temptations of the devil (Prov.1:10 – 'if sinners entice you, do not consent').
33. And so it's very possible for a temptation to arise from without (either from Satan, the world, or both).
34. (a) How may we know? Without being overly dogmatic, the description "fiery darts" sheds some light on this question.
35. Fiery darts are quick arrows that bring great pain; so too, Satan's temptations are quick and painful like darts.
36. We can be rather sure a temptation originates from without, if it fires across our soul like a shooting star.
37. Furthermore, the fiery darts of Satan oftentimes take the form of blasphemous thoughts against God and His word.
38. Christopher Love—"Satan is the chief instrument of those temptations which provoke God's people to blasphemy; not that there isn't in man's nature the seeds of all sin, even blasphemy; but the first suggestion ordinarily comes from the devil."
39. But I think one of the most obvious indications a temptation originated from without is that it frightens the soul.
40. Ordinarily, the fiery darts of Satan are so shockingly evil, that our soul responds with terror and alarm.
41. Christopher Love—"When a temptation is so strongly suggested that it makes a man quake, and horror comes upon him, this is an argument it comes from the devil."
42. Have you ever been reading your Bible, praying, or meditating upon Scripture, and a quick thought shoots across your mind?
43. Perhaps it's a wretched suggestion that God doesn't exist—or that God is actually unjust, evil, or a liar.
44. These are ordinarily, the fiery darts of the evil one, and have their origination outside of us in the devil.
45. (b) Why does it matter? Why does it even matter to try to discern the original source of any temptation?
46. Well, the primary reason I suggest this is important is because, we often wrongly blame ourselves for such things.
47. Now, is our flesh evil enough to be the original source of these temptations? Yes! Don't get me wrong.
48. But when a temptation flashes across the screen of our soul, and it's resisted—it's no sin on our part.
49. Yes, if we entertain the temptation it can become our sin, but it's no sin if quenched with the shield of faith.

50. I think it's very possible and even common, for a sensitive Christian, to wrongly lay the guilt of such a temptation at his own door, when in fact, it's the direct offspring of Satan himself.
51. (3) How do you know if you've fulfilled the lust of the flesh? Remember, fulfilling lust and actual sin are one and the same.
52. Thus, the simply answer to this question is—the lust is fulfilled when it's turned to actual sin by our consent.
53. There's a pancake batter I prefer, that comes with every ingredient necessary to make pancakes—the only thing needed is water.
54. And yet, without water it's impossible to make pancakes—and this is true with regards to actual sin.
55. There are two things necessary to fulfill the lusts of the flesh and conceive sin—there's desire and consent.
56. There can be no conception of sin, that is, the making of actual sin, without the lusts of the flesh and our consent.
57. Yes, the desires and lusts of the flesh are sinful, but there can be no actual sin unless we mix the lusts with consent (just as there can be no actual pancakes without mixing the batter with water – both are necessary).
58. Prov.1:10—"My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent"—to consent is to be willing, yield, or accept."
59. Now here the enticement originates from without—"if sinners entice you"—that is, if sinners tempt you.
60. But the principle is the same if we are tempted from within our without—we must not consent—we must not give in (we must never add water to the batter).
61. Jas.1:14-15—"But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."
62. James uses the concept of temptation in two related ways—as testing from God and as enticing from us.
63. The Greek word is the same while it has these two variations of meaning (the same is true of the English word 'tempt').
64. To tempt can mean two different things—to entice to evil or temper (as you temper a piece of steel by purifying it and making it stronger).
65. This is why the KJV uses the same word, temptations, throughout the passage, v2—"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall unto various temptations."
66. Why would we consider temptations a joy? Because James isn't talking temptations by trials, v3—"knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience."
67. But here's the thing—ordinarily, as we endure trials from God, our enemies also bring various temptations.
68. Thus, having clarified the fact that God does not tempt anyone to sin, he then identifies the primary villain (v14).
69. He uses the process of natural birth to illustrate his point—there's conception, birth, growth, and death (all true of us as well).
70. Sin is first conceived, it then gives birth, and when it's full-grown (it results in a habitual life-style), it ends in (eternal) death.
71. But the phrase I want to point is—"Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin" (enticement and conception).
72. (a) Enticement—"But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed"—this refers to the enticement of the flesh.

73. The flesh tempts us to sin by enticing us with various lusts and desires—this is of course, in itself sinful.
74. (b) Conception—James speaks of conception and birth as the same thing—"when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin."
75. This is how and when actual sin is made—it's conceived or born when we fulfill that desire by our consent.
76. Now, it's true and I fully admit, that James doesn't expressly mention our consent, but it's obviously implied.
77. V15—"Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin"—brethren, it cannot conceive without consent.
78. Two things are necessary for physical conception—one without the other will never do—both are necessary.
79. You can have all the one you want, but without the other there's no conception (just like you can have all the batter you want, but without water there's no pancakes).
80. The flesh can lust (or desire) all it wants, but without our consent there's no actual sin—both lust and consent are needed.
81. 1Pet.2:11—"Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain (refrain) from fleshly lusts which war against the soul."
82. Remember, several weeks ago I used the imagery that Christ has conquered the capitol city and sits on the throne.
83. And yet, the enemy launches a counter attack and seeks to regain the capitol and dethrone Christ Himself.
84. Here Peter exhorts us to "abstain from fleshly lusts"—to abstain means to refrain or distance oneself.
85. This is the opposite of consenting—to abstain is to reject or refuse something because you've had enough.
86. 1Pet.4:2-3—"you should no longer live the rest of your time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries."

### III. Concluding Thoughts

1. (1) We must humble ourselves as our greatest tempter lives within—man's greatest enemy is himself.
2. For example, if you took a man and put him in a little cell with no windows, hundreds of miles away from society.
3. And let's say, for the sake of illustration, the cell was constructed in such a way that it kept out Satan and his demons (something that is obviously impossible).
4. That man would still tempt and torment himself—why? Because every man is his greatest enemy (foe).
5. And this is why the old man (that is dominated and controlled by the flesh), has to be crucified or killed.
6. Gal.5:24—"And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires"—the old man controlled by the flesh has been killed (Gal.2:20 – 'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who lives, but Christ lives in me')."
7. This is really good news for poor sinners! Poor sinners who feel the power and full of their reigning flesh.
8. Who can liberate you from this monster? Who can deliver you from this power? There's only one that can and His name is Jesus!

9. Remember, we are enslaved to sin and Satan as our masters as a punishment from God for the guilt of our sin.
10. It's for this reason, when Christ paid our sin debt, He not only purchased salvation from the penalty of sin but also the power of sin.
11. And the benefits of this salvation are applied to every soul that comes to Christ by faith and is united to Him.
12. Thus Christ offers to you this morning a free salvation—salvation from the penalty and the power of sin.
13. But in order for you to experience this—the old man to actually be crucified and a new man take His place—you must be joined to Christ by faith.
14. (2) We must resist sinful desires to ensure they never become actual sins—our flesh is going to desire sin.
15. Now as we learned last week, we are not to do anything that tempts or entices the flesh—we are not to make provision for the flesh.
16. But the flesh will lust or desire things contrary to the word of God and it will oppose all holy and good things.
17. Our task is to abstain from these lusts and not consent to them—"resist the devil and he will flee from you."
18. (a) Remember, sin leaves you empty and guilty—by this I mean, sin never provides what it always promises.
19. (b) Remember, sin destroys your name and testimony—it brings shame upon the name and people of God.
20. (c) Remember, sin was the cause of our Savior's brutal death—"He was delivered up because of our transgressions."
21. (3) We must put on Christ before and after our conflict with the lusts of the flesh—by this I mean, the best way not to make provision for the flesh (to fulfill its lusts), is to put on the Lord Jesus Christ.
22. Put on Christ by reckoning true of you all that Scriptures says is true of you—you are dead to sin, Satan, and the world; you are a new creation in Christ; you are forgiven, accepted, and adopted.
23. Put on Christ by improving upon your union with Christ by obtaining from Him, all the resources you need to stand firm in Him and to stand against the schemes of the enemy.
24. Put on Christ by imitating all the graces and virtues that were Christ in perfection—walk as He walked.
25. But put on Christ after you've fulfilled the lust of the flesh (that is after you've consented with your lust and have conceived actual sin).
26. That is, find in Him grace to repent and find renewed cleansing, restoration, and motivation to serve Him.