

Growing In Christ-likeness

"Instead, clothe yourself with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. And don't let yourself think about ways to indulge your evil desires." Romans 13:14 NLT



In Romans 13:11-14, Paul talks about the nearness of the return of Jesus to the world. In light of His soon coming, Paul urges us to live right. We should be ready to stand before Jesus when He comes to take His followers to heaven. In short, the way to be ready to meet Jesus is to live a Christ-like life and a life of victory over the desires of our sinful nature. After our salvation, our ultimate goal is to grow spiritually to be like Jesus in behavior, speech, attitude, etc. *Do you want to be ready to meet Jesus if He returns today? Are you focused on growing in Christ-likeness?*

The Central Lesson and Application:

The goal of the Christian life is to grow in Christ-likeness and live in victory over our sinful nature.

1. Christ-likeness is the **GOAL** of the Christian life.

"Instead, clothe yourself with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ...."

Paul said we should "clothe" ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ. He was saying that we should grow to look like and act like Jesus. Jesus is our model for spiritual growth and the way we live. Several Biblical passages teach that we should grow to be like Jesus. See **Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 4:13; Philippians 2:5; 1 Peter 2:21; John 13:15; 1 Corinthians 11:1.**

2. Growing to be like Jesus is an **INTENTIONAL** choice we must make for our lives.

"Instead, clothe yourself with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ...."

When Paul said, "*clothe yourselves,*" this statement was a command. We must actively choose to grow to be like Jesus or decide not to do so. Growing to be like Jesus is not an automatic process. It is a choice every Christian must face. *What choice have you been making about growing to be like Jesus?*

3. There are several **STEPS** we can take to clothe ourselves with Jesus.

The Life Application Study Bible explains: "How do we clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ? First, we identify with Christ by being baptized (Galatians 3:27). This shows our solidarity with other Christians and with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Second, we exemplify the qualities Jesus showed while he was here on earth (love, humility, truth, service). In a sense, we role-play what Jesus would do in our situation (see Ephesians 4:24-32; Colossians 3:10-17). We also must not give our desires any opportunity to lead us into sin. Avoid those situations that open the door to gratifying sinful desires." Note on Romans 13:14.

We can add to this...

- Daily and moment-by-moment, surrender control of your life to Christ. Let him be in the driver's seat of your life.
- Often ask yourself WWJD - **W**hat **W**ould **J**esus **D**o?
- Seek to reflect the "fruit of the Spirit" in your life (see **Galatians 5:22-23**).
- Read & memorize scripture to release the Bible's power to change your heart.
- Connect with others in a small group Bible study. Growth accelerates and happens best in a small group environment.

4. The sinful nature **CONTINUES** to exist and seek control over our lives even after experiencing salvation.

"...And don't let yourself think about ways to indulge your evil desires."

Paul's warning concerning our thoughts to gratify the desires of the sinful nature admits that the sinful nature is alive and well in the heart of the Christian. Salvation does not remove the old sinful nature. It continues to exist and seeks to be in control of our lives. The difference between a Christian and a non-Christian is that the non-Christian has only one nature - the sinful nature. The Christian has two natures - the old sinful nature and a new redeemed nature. The non-Christian cannot help but live after the old sinful nature. On the other hand, the Christian can live by the old nature or the new nature. *Which nature usually controls your life?* The two natures can also be seen in **Galatians 5:16-17**.

5. Sin starts with our **THOUGHTS**.

"...And don't let yourself think about ways to indulge your evil desires."

Paul warns us not to consider how to gratify our sinful nature's desires. We must head sin off at the path of our thoughts. So goes our thoughts, so goes our behavior. Jesus taught us that the thoughts of our hearts are the source of sinful behavior (see **Matthew 15:18-20; Philippians 4:8**).

6. The desires of the sinful nature are **POWERFUL** and impossible to overcome by self-determination - we must draw upon the power of the Holy Spirit.

"So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves." Galatians 5:16 NLT

If we try to live right in our strength or by mere determination, we will frequently succumb to our sinful desires. We need the Holy Spirit's power to help us intentionally say "No" to the desires of the old nature and "yes" to the new nature. Paul taught that the Holy Spirit was essential to winning over the old sinful nature in **Galatians 5:16-17** (Also see Colossians 3:5-10; Ephesians 4:22-24). *Do you regularly surrender and depend upon the Holy Spirit for victory over the sinful desires of your old nature?*

Conclusion

The goal of the Christian life is to grow in Christ-likeness and live in victory over our sinful nature.

Suggested prayer: *"Dear Heavenly Father, please forgive me for the many times I surrendered to the sinful desires of my old nature. Help me to clothe myself with the Lord Jesus Christ. Help me to grow in Christ-likeness and to say "no" to my old nature intentionally. I invite the Holy Spirit to be in control of my life. I will surrender to Him moment by moment. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen."*