

CHRISTOLOGY (26)

The study of the hypostatic union and the false theories which surround this critical doctrine should make us very cautious about what we say and believe and even allow to be said about Jesus Christ. Dr. Charles Ryrie says that such a study "...should help clarify the truth and make us more careful how we express it. Semantics are very important in statements of theology" (*Basic Theology*, p. 252).

When speaking to someone about Jesus Christ, or further still, when someone is speaking to us about Jesus Christ, we must be sure to ask the person to explain exactly what he means by the terms being used. Knowing that many false theories exist concerning Jesus Christ should prompt every one of us to make absolutely sure that what is being discussed is theologically accurate. Remember, all heresy, in one way or another, will attack Jesus Christ.

QUESTION #14 – What is meant by the impeccability of Jesus Christ?

The issue of the impeccability of Jesus Christ or the peccability of Jesus Christ is closely connected to one's understanding of the hypostatic union. As Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer says: "Here the fact of the unity of His Person is involved and becomes in a large measure the key to the solution of the problem" (Vol. 1, p. 393).

To simply state the issue:

- 1) **Impeccability** - means that Jesus Christ could not sin.
- 2) **Peccability** - means that Jesus Christ could sin.

Concerning this Christological matter there have been three different views, only one of which may be correct:

View #1 - Some hold to the position that Christ could sin. This view focuses on Christ's humanity.

View #2 - Some hold to the position that Christ would not sin. This view tends to hold to the belief that the possibility was there, but because of certain attributes He would not choose to sin.

View #3 - Some hold to the position that Christ could not sin. This view believes that Jesus did not have the possibility of ever sinning because He was God and God cannot sin. This is the position that I believe is correct, as do many other theologians—Dr. Chafer, Dr. Walvoord, Dr. Ryrie, Mr. Miles and many others.

This matter is really resolved by the hypostatic union. Any attempt to say Christ could have sinned is an attempt to somehow separate His humanity from His deity.

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Dr. Chafer writes: "In the course of the argument which this problem engenders, it is essential to recognize that, as demonstrated in the case of the first Adam, an unfallen human being may sin; and from this it may be reasoned, were there no other factors to be considered, that the unfallen humanity of Christ could have sinned. It is at this point that error intrudes. If isolated and standing alone, it is claimed that the humanity of Christ, being unsupported, could have willed against God as Adam did. The misleading fallacy is that the humanity of Christ could ever stand alone and unsupported by His Deity" (Vol. 1, p. 393).

There are certain things we specifically know about God:

- 1) We know from God's Word that He cannot be tempted to do evil. James 1:13
- 2) We know from God's Word that He does not and cannot change. James 1:17
- 3) We know from God's Word that He does not have any darkness in Him. I John 1:5

Therefore, knowing these things about God and knowing Jesus Christ is God, we must conclude that there is no possible way Jesus Christ could have sinned unless there is a tampering with the hypostatic union, which would attempt to separate His humanity from His Deity.

Dr. William T. Shedd gives a good illustration of the impossibility of Christ sinning. He says if you take a wire, it is very pliable and bendable by the hands of a human being. However, if you weld that wire onto an unbendable bar of steel, it is impossible for human hands to bend that wire. So it is with Christ's two natures—both humanity and Deity have been welded together into one Person. One nature is that of a man, but the other is that of God. It is very clear that God cannot sin; it is also clear that as long as these two natures are welded together, Christ cannot sin either, because He is God.

We may also observe a critical Christological statement found in Hebrews 13:8. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. If people concede that Christ could have sinned while on earth, then they must also concede that He is still capable of sinning today, for whatever He was then, He is still the same today.

Dr. Charles Feinberg gives a very noteworthy statement regarding this matter:

"First of all, the hypostatic union gave the world an impeccable Person. This predicates of Christ, mark you, not only anamartesia (sinlessness) but impeccability. It is not just a matter of posse non peccare (possible not to sin), but of non posse peccare (not possible to sin). It is not enough to say Christ did not sin; it must be declared unequivocally that He could not sin. To entertain for a moment the thought that Christ could sin, would involve issues that call for a radical revolution in our conception of the Godhead. To say that Christ could not sin is not tantamount to maintaining He could not be tempted, but because He was God He could not sin, for there was no sin principle in Christ that could or would respond to solicitation to sin" (Chafer, Vol. 1, p. 394).

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Those who hold to the peccability of Christ (He could have sinned) really struggle with the concept as to how one could be impeccable and really be tempted. To state it another way, is it possible to have a real temptation if the person being tempted cannot possibly sin? When we read a passage like Hebrews 4:15, it certainly reveals that Christ went through the same kinds of things we experience. To sum up the matter—"Can Jesus Christ, if He is impeccable, really be tempted?"

Dr. John Walvoord does an excellent job answering this question:

"The answer must be in the affirmative. The question is simply is it possible to attempt the impossible? To this all would agree. It is possible for a rowboat to attack a battleship, even though it is conceivably impossible for the rowboat to conquer the battleship. The idea that temptability implies susceptibility is unsound. While the temptation may be real, there may be infinite power to resist that temptation and if this power is infinite, the person is impeccable. It will be observed that the same temptation which would be easily resisted by one of sound character may be embraced by one of weak character. The temptation of a drunken debauch would have little chance of causing one to fall who had developed an abhorrence of drink, while a habitual drunkard would easily be led astray. The temptation might be the same in both cases, but the ones tempted would have contrasting powers of resistance. It is thus demonstrated that there is no essential relation between temptability and peccability" (*Jesus Christ Our Lord*, p. 147).

There are certain key observations we must make concerning Christ's temptations:

Observation #1 - The temptations of Christ were real.

Obviously, it is foolish to doubt or deny the reality of the temptation, when various tests or temptations actually occurred. For example, Matthew 4:1-11 gives clear testimony that Christ's temptations were real. We must conclude that Christ was really tested.

Observation #2 - The temptations of Christ were unique.

Christ's testings were very unique to Him. For example, the temptation to turn a stone into bread (Matt. 4:3), is not even a possible temptation for an ordinary man because no ordinary man is capable of actually doing this.

Observation #3 - The temptations of Christ were satanic.

This is a very critical point of observation. The testings of Jesus Christ were not brought about as a result of an old Adamic sin nature that promotes evil from within, but Christ's temptations were brought about as a direct work of Satan. A good illustration is found in Matt. 4:1-11. In verses 8-9, Satan offers Christ world-ruling rights at that very moment. This is something he only offered Jesus Christ. It is a very subtle and satanic temptation which tries to get Christ to eliminate Calvary.

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Observation #4 - The temptations of Christ were Spirit-led.

Matthew 4:1 is a very critical verse because it presents a major difference between Christ's temptation and our temptations. When we are tempted, we are tempted by our own lusts (James 1:14). We have an old sin nature that prompts us to do evil. Through the world, the flesh and the devil, this world offers lures that our lustful nature is drawn toward. All Satan has to do is find the weakness in a person and appeal to it and the inward lusts take over. However, Matthew 4:1 makes it explicitly clear that Jesus Christ's temptations were orchestrated by the Holy Spirit. He was actually led into His temptations; not by an old, Adamic sin nature, but by the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit orchestrated an external circumstance in which Christ would be tempted by Satan. But since Christ has no evil principle within Him, He cannot do anything wrong. Thus the Spirit-led temptation ends up establishing the integrity of the Person—namely Jesus Christ is God.

Observation #5 - The temptations of Christ were different.

Although Christ's temptations were real, they were also very different. It is true that a verse like Hebrews 4:15 make it clear that Christ experienced the same types of categories of temptations that we experience, but sound doctrine also demands we clearly understand the differences:

(Difference #1) - Christ was different in His Deity.

Deity cannot ever be tempted to evil (James 1:13). There is absolutely no inner lure within Deity that prompts it to do evil. A verse like I John 2:16 or Matthew 5:28 is not a possibility with Jesus Christ. His Deity makes evil impossible; therefore, His temptations must be different.

(Difference #2) - Christ was different in His humanity.

Christ's humanity is perfect, holy humanity. We would never find Jesus Christ struggling as Paul did in Romans 7:15-24. It is really the humanity of Christ that makes any temptation possible, but it must always be kept in mind that His humanity is perfect and holy. Had Christ had an Adamic sin nature, He would have been capable of sin. However, He had no such nature (Luke 1:35).

One passage that comes under great scrutiny on this subject is Hebrews 4:15. This text is one that has been greatly misunderstood when pertaining to the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

Obviously, even before attempting to interpret the verse, we know that it does not mean that Jesus Christ experienced every temptation that humans experience. For example, Jesus Christ was never tempted to watch something immoral on television for several reasons, one of which is it would be 1900 years before television was invented. We also know that temptations Christ experienced were not a result of having a sin nature luring Him to do evil. For example, we have a nature that desires to watch something godless on television, but He had no such nature.

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The Greek of Hebrews 4:15 is non-articular (anarthrous). What this grammatically means is that Christ can sympathize with us because He went through the same character and quality of trials and testings which we go through. The God-man knew exactly what it was like to experience hurt, loneliness, abandonment and suffering. He knows what it is like to be rejected. He knows what it is like to bear a cross. He knows what it is like to live in a proud, rebellious, satanic world. His humanity afforded Him the opportunity to experience these same kinds of trials and struggles that we experience, yet without any sin. Never once did sin enter into the picture of His life. It is this that enables Him to be our faithful and perfect High Priest. We can come to Him, knowing He won. Even though we buckle or waver, He didn't. The preposition "without" ("without sin") indicates Christ was totally separated, totally apart from, without any sin. Sin was nowhere in the picture of the temptations of Christ (G. Abbott-Smith, p. 486).

Again we cite Dr. Walvoord:

"It is rationally inconceivable that Christ could sin. It is clear that Christ is not peccable in heaven now, even though He possesses a true humanity. If Christ is impeccable in heaven because of who He is, then it is also true that Christ was impeccable on earth because of who He was. While it was possible for Christ in the flesh to suffer limitations of an unmoral sort—such as weakness, suffering, fatigue, sorrow, hunger, anger and even death—none of these created any complication which affected His immutable holiness. God could have experienced through the human nature of Christ these things common to the race, but God could not sin even when joined to human nature. If sin were possible in the life of Christ, the whole plan of the universe hinged on the outcome of His temptations. The doctrine of the sovereignty of God would forbid any such haphazard condition. It is therefore not sufficient to hold that Christ did not sin, but rather to attribute to His person all due adoration in that He could not sin. While the person of Christ could therefore be tempted, there was no possibility of sin entering the life of Him appointed from eternity to be the spotless Lamb of God" (*Jesus Christ our Lord*, p. 152).

W.E. Best does an excellent job of expounding Hebrews 4:15 and we cite his conclusions: "The weaknesses (astheneias, dative plural of astheneia, weakness) did not refer to sin. They cover the frailties of human nature. Christ's human nature was subject to limitations and trials which the one exception that He could have no experimental knowledge of sin. He did not possess a sinful human nature. His human nature was only made in the likeness of sinful nature (Rom. 8:3). Christ's conception and birth protect His human nature from defilement with depravity. "As we are" is the translation of kath homoio, ablative singular of homoiotes, which means in a similar way, not in the identical way that we are tempted. This form of the Greek word "as we are" is used only here and in Hebrews 7:15. There it is translated "the likeness of Mechisedec." There is more profound truth that "yet without sin" or "without committing sin." The Greek word "choris" means apart from, without, on a distinct footing from or independently of. The most common interpretation of choris hamartias is "without yielding to sin," but it has a stronger meaning. In Christ's statement, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" (John 8:7), the Greek word "without sin" is anamartatos (used only here) which means without sin or guiltless. In this case, it means he who has committed no sin. However, choris is stronger in meaning than anamartatos. The Greek word choris is used as an adjective with the ablative of separation in every place with the exception of John 20:7.

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There, it is used as an adverb. Christ was completely separated from sin because there was no sin in Him to be aroused by temptation. The Lord Jesus did not sin because He could not sin. He was impeccable. Therefore, He remained undefiled in a world of sin. Impeccability is united to holiness. This is in direct opposition to peccability which is related to temptability. While no human being is beyond the possibility of temptation because of inward depravity, Christ had no inward depravity with which to struggle. His human will was always subservient to His divine will. He always pleased the Father (John 8:29). Christ's holiness was one of equality with the Father" (W.E. Best, *Christ Could Not Be Tempted*, pp. 27-28).

To sum up, the hypostatic union (the uniting of Christ's Divine nature and human nature into one inseparable and indivisible Person) makes it impossible for Jesus Christ to sin, for God cannot sin. The impeccability of Jesus Christ is thus established by who He is—God.

QUESTION #15 – What are the proofs that Jesus Christ was truly God?

Any true doctrinal study of Jesus Christ that is an accurate and worth representation of Scripture will dogmatically declare Christ's Deity—**Jesus Christ is God!** In fact, God the Father demands that all people honor Jesus Christ at the same level they honor Him (John 5:23). God the Father demands that God the Son be honored as the God of the Bible. It would stand to reason then that there would be sufficient evidence found in the Bible that Jesus Christ is the God worthy of this ultimate level of honor. When we examine the Bible, we certainly see this is true. We offer six proofs that Jesus Christ is truly God:

Proof #1 - Jesus Christ is specifically called God !

One cannot deny that in many passages, the Bible, time and time again, calls Jesus Christ God.

- 1) John 1:1 - the Word, which became flesh (1:14), "was God."
- 2) John 20:28 - He is identified by one who doubted as being the Lord/God.
- 3) Rom. 9:5 - Christ was in the flesh but He is also "God blessed forever."
- 4) Titus 2:13 - Jesus Christ is "our great God and Savior."
- 5) Heb. 1:8 - God the Father (1:5) testifies that God the Son is "God."
- 6) I John 5:20 - Jesus Christ is "the true God" and He is "eternal life."
- 7) Isaiah 7:14 - Isaiah predicted God would be with us (Immanuel) by virgin birth.
- 8) Isaiah 9:6 - Isaiah predicted a Jewish child would be born who is "Mighty God."

These statements about Jesus Christ cannot be overlooked or disregarded—they say He is God.