

Faith Pulpit

The Impeccability of Christ

Introduction

Our topic asks the question, “Was it possible for Jesus Christ to sin when He was tempted during His earthly ministry?” Those who answer, “yes it was possible for Him to sin, though He did not choose to sin” are teaching the peccability of Christ. Those who answer, “no, it was not possible for Jesus Christ to sin” are teaching the impeccability of Christ.

A Presentation of the Doctrine

It is my purpose to show that Jesus Christ was and is impeccable, i.e. that it was impossible for Him to sin. I believe this to be true because:

1. Jesus Christ had two natures but they were united in one person. It is clear from Scripture that Jesus Christ had a human nature as well as a divine nature (see Romans 1:3 & 1 Timothy 2:5). But it is also clear that Jesus was one person (see John 17:23, 1 John 4:2, Romans 1:3). Strong (Systematic Theology, p. 673) says, “The orthodox doctrine holds that in the one person Jesus Christ there are two natures, a human nature and a divine nature, each in its completeness and integrity, and that these two natures are organically and indissolubly united, yet so that no third nature is formed thereby.”

While M.R. DeHaan (The Temptation of Jesus, p. 2) admits this truth, he goes on to argue that Jesus could have sinned because “the humanity of Jesus was no different from the humanity of Adam before He fell” (p. 3) and “... when He met Satan in the wilderness, (He) met him as the Son of MAN, and not as the Son of God” (p. 4, emphasis are his).

This is a contradiction! If Jesus Christ was one person, then it was impossible for Christ to be tempted only as a human being.

2. Jesus Christ had two desires (human and divine) but the human desire always obeyed the divine desire. Our Lord Jesus was under terrific pressure in the Garden of Gethsemane and yet His will was submissive to the will of His Heavenly Father (see Matthew 26:39, 42, 44).

3. Jesus Christ's divine nature, and not His human nature, is the base of His person. This is crucial to our understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Let me recommend *Eternal Sonship of Christ* by J.C. Philpot as good reading in this area.) Shedd (*Dogmatic Theology*, II, p. 269-270) states: "The eternal Son, or the Word, is personal per se. He is from everlasting to everlasting conscious of himself as distinct from the Father, and from the Holy Spirit. He did not acquire personality by union with a human nature ... On the contrary, the human nature which he assumed to himself acquired personality by its union with him ... That the personality of the God-man depends primarily upon the divine nature, and not upon the human, is also evinced by the fact that this complex theanthropic (i.e., God-man) personality was not destroyed by the death of Christ" (see John 1:1, 14).

4. The overall testimony of the Bible does not present Jesus Christ as a man who won victory over sinful temptation, but rather it presents Him as a completely holy person (see Hebrews 7:26). Berkhouwer (*The Person of Christ*, p. 256) comments, "The Bible certainly speaks, not of a final victory over sinful, rebellious desire, but of a holiness which pervades his entire existence, inside and outside."

5. The fact that Jesus Christ is unchangeable guarantees His impeccability. Hebrews 13:8 states that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. This does not refer to any specific act (e.g. it would be improper to use this verse to teach that because Christ once created the world, that He must continue to do so). Instead, this passage teaches that Jesus Christ is unchangeable in His person. He has and always will be God and as God, (though not the Father but the Son) He shares the divine attributes. One of those attributes is holiness. Best puts it well when he says, "Holiness is far more than the absence of sin; it is positive virtue ... To say that He could have sinned is to deny positive holiness. To deny positive holiness, therefore, is to deny the holy character of God. Holiness is positive virtue which has neither room for nor interest in sin. The Lord Jesus could not sin because the days of His flesh meant only addition of experience, not variation of character" (cf. Best, *The Impeccable Christ*, p. 8).

6. The fact that Jesus Christ is omnipotent (all powerful) guarantees His impeccability. Walvoord (*Jesus Christ Our Lord*, p. 151-152) carefully distinguishes between having ALL power and sufficient power. Sufficient power would enable Christ not to sin. But our Lord Jesus Christ had more than sufficient power. He had ALL power and therefore was not able to sin.

7. The fact that Jesus Christ is omniscient (all knowing) guarantees His impeccability. Walvoord (*Jesus Christ Our Lord*, p. 152) states, "Sin frequently appeals to the ignorance of the one tempted. Thus Eve was deceived and sinned, though Adam was not deceived as to the nature of the transgression. In the

case of Christ, the effects of sin were perfectly known, with all the contributing factors. It was impossible for Christ having omniscience to commit that which He knew could only bring eternal woe to Himself and to the race.”

Answers to Objections

1. “If Christ could not have sinned, His temptation was not real.” M.R. DeHaan says, “There is but little glory in not sinning when it is IMPOSSIBLE to sin” (The Temptation of Jesus, p. 13). Again DeHaan says (p. 19), “Therein lies the glory of His victory—not that He could not sin—but that HE WOULD NOT SIN. Otherwise there could have been no temptation.”

The answer to this objection is that there can indeed be a genuine temptation without the possibility of Christ’s yielding to it. This is because temptability does not imply that the one being tempted must be able to yield to the temptation Walvoord (Jesus Christ Our Lord, p. 147) states, “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.”

Related to this objection is the idea that true freedom involves the possibility of choosing to sin. Yet we know that God has free will (Ephesians 1:11) and it is impossible for Him to lie (Titus 1:2). Francis Pieper (Christian Dogmatics, II, p. 76) remarks, “The assertion that ‘freedom’ must always involve the possibility of sinning operates with a false conception of freedom. The saints in heaven cannot sin, and still they are not unfree, but enjoy a state of perfect freedom.”

2. “If Christ could not have sinned, then He cannot be our example as Hebrews 4:15 says He is.” This is DeHaan’s argument (The Temptation of Jesus, p. 8).

The answer to this objection is that the parallel between our blessed Lord and ourselves is not that because He conquered temptation we can also. How could such a parallel exist? He had no sin nature. We do. He never sinned. We do. Our sin nature offers the tempter an inward point of temptation. This was missing in Jesus. Hebrews 4:15 does not say that Jesus was tempted so that He could be our example, but so that He could sympathize with us. He was human. He got tired. He was hungry. In this sense His temptations were real and in this sense He can understand when we, too, become weary. But this is vastly different from saying Jesus Christ could have sinned. Berkhouwer (The Person of Christ, p. 254,255) clearly presents this truth.

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Dr. Houghton was promoted to Heaven on July 13, 2020, leaving a legacy of service and faithfulness to the thousands of men and women who he impacted during his ministry.