

## ***The Temptations of Christ in His Humanity***

When we think about Christ's temptations, we must remember that Jesus is a unique person; He is both fully God and fully human. Because His human nature never existed independently of His divine nature the question arises if it was possible for Jesus to sin.

Although Jesus is perfect man and perfect God, He is but one person. There is no evidence in the Bible of a twofold personality in Christ. Jesus always referred to Himself as "I, Me, My, Mine" not "We, Us, Our." He is always spoken of as He, His, Him. When Jesus acted, His actions involved His whole person. Some therefore, conclude that this must mean that Jesus could not have sinned for His divine nature would prevent it; God cannot be tempted with evil (Ja. 1:13). Such an argument seems logically reasonable; however, it is not unchallenged. Hodge, for example, argues in the opposite direction. He says,

"The Mediator between God and man must be sinless. Under the law the victim offered on the altar must be without blemish. Christ, who was to offer Himself unto God as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, must be Himself free from sin. The High Priest, therefore, who becomes us, He whom our necessities demand, must be holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. (Heb 7:26). He was, therefore, "without sin." (Heb 4:15: I Pet. 2:22). A sinful Savior is an impossibility. He could not have access to God. He could not be a sacrifice for sins; and He could not be the source of holiness and eternal life to his people. This sinlessness of our Lord, however, does not amount to absolute impeccability [i.e. being incapable of sinning]. It was not a *non potest peccare* [lit. "the King can do no wrong"]. *If He was a true man He must have been capable of sinning. That He did not sin under the greatest provocation; that when He was reviled He blessed; when He suffered He threatened not; that He was dumb, as a sheep before its shearers, is held up to us as an example. Temptation implies the possibility of sin. If from the constitution of his person it was impossible for Christ to sin, then his temptation was unreal and without effect, and He cannot sympathize with his people.*" (Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II, 458)

Whether the union of the divine and human natures made it impossible for Jesus to sin or not, neither view believes that Jesus depended on His divine nature to resist temptation. Jesus refused to rely on His divine nature to make obedience easier for Him; rather, He faced every temptation by depending upon the Holy Spirit to strengthen His human will to submit to God. In other words, Jesus' means of resisting temptation was no different than anyone who depends on the Holy Spirit to conquer sin. In this respect the peccability or impeccability of Christ is not an issue.

### ***Hebrews 4:14-15***

***14 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.***

***15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.***

Although Christ was tempted, His temptation differed from ours in another respect: verse 15 says that He has been tempted in every way, just as we are--*yet was without sin*. Some see this as meaning that even though He was tempted as we are, He never yielded to His temptations and sinned. This is surely true, and the easiest understanding, but the emphasis of the passage doesn't seem to be whether Christ has ever sinned or not; rather, the issue is whether Jesus *could* be tempted and really sympathize with us. It seems better, therefore, to take this as meaning that He was tempted in every way that we are (so He can sympathize with us), yet none of His temptations sprung from a sinful nature. In other words, "without sin" means that He neither sinned, nor was sin at the root of His temptation.

If Jesus was *not* tempted by sinful desires, how can He be tempted as we are?

“Temptation” can be used of both God and man. When man tempts God, he challenges God. Tempting God is an expression of doubt, unbelief and disobedience (cf. Exo. 17:1-7; Isa. 7:12). When man is tempted, he is placed in a situation to choose between his will or God's. Jesus never tempted or tested God, but He was tempted to choose His own will above the Father's.

At the root of temptation is inward desire. Some desires are evil in themselves (Ja. 4:1-4), other desires are not. For example, the desire for self-preservation and physical intimacy are part of our human nature, created by God, so the human race would flourish. If we didn't care if we lived or died or had no interest in procreation we would be extinct.

When Christ was hungry, it was not sinful to desire bread. Hunger pains simply tell the body that it needs food. However, if eating bread was against the will of the Father, it would have been sinful to fulfill that desire (Matt. 4:3-4; Broadus, 63). Likewise, it is not sinful for Jesus to want to preserve His life. However, if by doing so He was acting contrary to God's will, it would be better for Him to die (Matt. 4:8-9; 26:42). Thus, temptation occurs when we are faced with a choice to disobey the will of God or not.

Jesus, like us, had to choose to surrender to God's will or revolt against it, but He was never tempted by desires springing from an evil heart. Therefore, because Jesus never hated, He was not tempted to kill. Because He was never filled with lust, He was not tempted to commit fornication. Because he never submitted to greed, He was not tempted to steal. In this way He was *not* like us, for many of our temptations come from the sinful desires of a sin nature. As James 4:2-3 says, “We lust and do not have it; so we murder. We covet something and cannot obtain it; so we fight and quarrel. We ask and do not receive, because we ask wrongly, in order to spend it on our pleasures.” These things could not be said of Christ.

Not every man is tempted alike, yet every temptation has at its core the same basic element of choice. In that sense all temptations are the same. As I Corinthians 10:13 says, none of us have experienced a temptation that is unique to humanity. There is no excuse to sin because we feel that no one else has ever gone through what we are going through. Just as it isn't necessary for us to go through every temptation in order to understand what temptation is, it wasn't necessary for Christ to experience every temptation known to man to be able to sympathize with us. In fact, since Christ never yielded to any temptation, He was tempted beyond our experience for we fall long before the temptation is exhausted. He endured until the full force of the temptation was completely spent.

By way of analogy, Adam and Eve were not created with sin natures (God declared their creation to be “very good” – Gen 1:31), yet as human beings they possessed the possibility of yielding to temptation. Mankind's first sin did not spring from an evil nature, it resulted in one. So also Christ had genuine human nature: innocent, though capable of yielding to temptation. However, unlike Adam and Eve, Jesus never succumbed to the temptations around Him. At the same time it could be said that Jesus experienced temptation in the fullest sense.

“Fifty years ago C.S. Lewis imagined someone objecting here: “If Jesus never sinned, then he doesn't know what temptation is like. He lived a sheltered life and is out of touch with how strong temptation can be.” Here is what Lewis wrote in response to that objection:

“It is silly to think “that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is . . . A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. That is why bad people, in one sense know very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in . . . Christ, because He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means. . . ” (sermon by John Piper, Heb. 4:14-5:3, September 15, 1996 - John Piper. © Desiring God. Website: [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org)).

Having a high priest that can sympathize with our weaknesses inspires confidence. So the writer of Hebrews exhorts his readers to approach God boldly (4:16) without fear of rejection. It is at the throne of God that we can receive mercy in time of need – that is, He gives help that is appropriate to the time. Mercy speaks of God relieving man of His miseries. In times of weakness and need, God promises relief.

As a man, Christ is sympathetic to our needs. He faced what we face every day in our lives. However, He went through it with one major difference, He did not sin. He not only knows what we are going through, He knows how to help us go through it successfully. As the great high priest, He has power to give us open access to God so that we can receive help in our times of need. Because all of this is true, we can approach the throne with confidence – to find help and mercy and grace. Why should we hold back in approaching His throne?