

Doctrine of the Impeccability of Christ

The Sinless Savior

1. Though some within the Church have taught that Christ could sin, the orthodox position has always been that the Lord Jesus Christ could *not* have sinned.

“The point of view that Christ could sin is designated by the idea of peccability, and the fact that He could not sin is expressed by the term impeccability. To suggest the capability or possibility of sinning would disqualify Christ as Savior, for a peccable Christ would mean a peccable God. Holiness is far more than the absence of sin; it is positive virtue.

The advocates of peccability say, 'Christ could have sinned, but He did not.' 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 that 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. Holy humanity was united to Deity in one indivisible person, the impeccable Christ. Jesus Christ cannot have more holiness because He is perfectly holy; He cannot have less holiness because He is unchangeably holy” (*Studies in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ*, W.E. Best).

2. In discussing the doctrine of the impeccability of Christ, a person must remember several foundational truths.
 - First, Jesus is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies that are grounded in the eternal decrees of God. The divine decree foreordained that the Messiah would be without sin and therefore a worthy Savior. To say that Jesus could not have sinned is to say that the decrees of God could not fail as they were manifested in fulfilled prophecies.
 - Second, there is moral certitude. If someone were to give you a butcher knife and invite you to cut out the eyes of your child for the mere pleasure of it, you would recoil in horror. You could not do that! If you were offered a million dollars for cutting out the eyes and ten million dollars more if you drove a nail into the child's brain, you could not do that! You would die before you harmed your child in such a manner. The soul of Jesus Christ was so holy and so pure that the suggestion of any sin was just as abhorrent as the scenario set out above. Jesus could not sin.
 - Third, it must never be forgotten that Jesus was not two persons in one body. He was one Person with two natures. While He was truly human, He was altogether God, and as the God-man He could not sin.
 - Fourth, the capacity to sin is not what makes man. If there were no capacity to sin, man would still be man; for there was no sin in Adam when he was first created, yet he is called man (Genesis 2:7). In our resurrected bodies, we will still be human but without the sin nature. Whatever constitutes man as man does not necessitate sin or a sin nature. Therefore, it was not necessary that Jesus have the moral capacity to sin in order to be true humanity.

- Finally, to embrace a concept that there was the possibility of Jesus' sinning but that He simply chose not to, might make one feel psychologically good; it might make Jesus seem to be more like "me." But Jesus is not like "me." No one who is born of a virgin is just like "me." No one who is truly God is just like "me." Jesus did not come into the world to be just like other men. He came to rescue fallen men from the depths of sin into which they had fallen.
3. To believe that Jesus could have sinned if He so chose is an unworthy thought of Him, for it presupposes that there is still something in His nature susceptible to sin.
 4. Logically, this means that Christ was not and is not quite perfect. Christ was not perfect because He consistently chose not to sin.
 - He was perfect and therefore He was without sin.
 - Jesus was perfect in Mary's womb. He was perfect in the hour of His birth.
 - He was perfect as a child.
 - He was perfect as a man in His ministry.
 - He was perfect in His death.
 - He is perfect today in His glorified, resurrection body.
 5. To say that Christ could have sinned is to say that Christ could still sin yet, He just chooses not to.
 6. The peccability of Christ is unacceptable to a high view of Christology. Jesus Christ is the same today, yesterday, and forever. He did not and He could not sin.
 7. Early Church councils were called to give form to and defend this truth.

Main Points Proving the Impeccability of Christ

8. In the year AD 451 the *Council of Chalcedon* met and formulated the faith of the Church respecting the person of Christ, and declared Him, "to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of the natures being in no wise taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons."
9. The great truth enunciated is that the eternal Son of God took upon Himself our humanity, which includes making choices, and not that the man Jesus acquired divinity.

10. Vehement argument has raged around the question, “*Did the Lord's deity render sin impossible, and consequently make His temptations unreal?*” The following proposition is place for consideration: “*If, to Christ, sin was impossible, then His temptation by Satan was a meaningless display, and His victory a mere delusion, and His coronation (Phil. 2:6) a shadow.*”
11. One answer to this problem is to argue for both positions. “*We may say it was impossible Jesus would sin. We dare not say it was impossible He could not sin.*”
12. While this response would please many, for others it does not do justice to either the Scriptures or to the person of Christ. It is a matter of record that once the concept is conceded that Jesus could sin, the temptation comes to teach and believe that He did sin or that He was less than very God of very God.
13. From the very beginning, the Church has argued that Jesus was free, both from hereditary depravity, and from actual sin.
- Jesus never offered a sacrifice for sin.
 - Jesus never prayed for forgiveness. Jesus frequently went up to the Temple, but He never offered sacrifice. He prayed, “*Father, forgive them*” (Luke 23:34), but He never prayed: “*Father, forgive me.*”
 - Jesus taught that others needed the new birth. He said: “*Ye must be born anew*” (John 3:7); but the words indicated that He had no such need. Jesus not only yielded to God's will when made known to him, but also sought it: “*I seek not mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me*” (John 5:30). It was not personal experience of sin, but perfect resistance to it that made Jesus fit to deliver us from it. The choices that Jesus made to behave and honor the will of the Father were consistent with His essence where there was nothing which sin could touch.
 - Jesus challenged others to convict Him of a single sin. *And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: “therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God”* (Luke 1:35). “*Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?*” (John 8:46). “*Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me*” (John 14:30). There was not the slightest evil inclination upon which temptation could lay hold of Christ.
14. Another question arises, “*If in Christ there was no sin, or tendency to sin, how could He be tempted?*”
15. The answer is that Jesus was tempted in the same way that Adam was tempted which is susceptibility to all the forms of innocent desires.

16. To these desires temptations may appeal. Sin consists, not in these desires, but in the gratification of them out of God's order, and contrary to God's will. So Satan appealed to our Lord's desire for food, for applause, and for power (Matthew 4:11).
17. Because most temptations are addressed either to desire or fear, it can be said that Christ "*was in all points tempted like as we are*" (Hebrews 4:15).
18. The first temptation, in the wilderness, was addressed to His desire; the second, in the garden, was addressed to His fears. Satan, after the first temptation, "*departed from him for a season*" (Luke 4:13), but returned when Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane.
19. Still, the Lord was able to say that "*the prince of the world cometh: and he hath nothing in me*" (John 14:30).
20. Satan was trying to deter Jesus from His work at Calvary by rousing within Him vast and agonizing fear with which His holy soul was moved. But it did not work, "*He was without sin*" (Hebrews 4:15).
21. To press the point of the Impeccability of Christ more closely, we ascribe to Christ not only natural, but also moral integrity, or moral perfection, that is sinlessness.
22. This means not merely that Christ could avoid sinning, and did actually avoid it, but also that it was impossible for Him to sin because of the essential bond between the human and the divine natures.
23. The sinlessness of Christ is clearly testified to in the following passages:
 - *Luke 1:35 And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.*
 - *John 8:46 Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?*
 - *John 14:30 Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.*
 - *2 Corinthians 5:21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*
 - *Hebrews 4:15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*
 - *Hebrews 9:14 How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*

- *1 Peter 2:22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.*
 - *1 John 3:5 And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.*
24. While Christ was made to be sin judicially, yet ethically He was free from both hereditary depravity and actual sin.
 25. Part of the problem for those who do not embrace the impeccability of Christ is the tendency to believe that Jesus is but a man.
 26. Yet, there is at the same time a longing to ascribe to Him the essence of God.
 27. There is also the desire to affirm divinity for Christ in virtue of the immanence of God in Him, and the powerful presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit.
 28. The truth of the matter is this: there two natures in Christ. He is both Divine and Human in one Person forever (*Studies in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ*, W.E. Best).