

How Could

JESUS

Be Sinless As a

Baby ...

If He Took

Our Fallen,

Sinful Nature



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*An Exploratory Essay on an Intriguing Subject*

ROBERT J. WIELAND

# DEDICATED

To a search for unity within the  
Seventh-day Adventist Church.  
How can we understand the gospel unless we  
understand the truth of Christ  
and His righteousness?

The author claims no superior wisdom. He  
believes we should all study into the Word  
more carefully.

May the dear Lord give to all of us discernment  
to recognize that fourth angel's message of  
Revelation 18, so it may soon lighten the earth  
with glory. May He grant us the ability to  
discern between Romanism and the "third  
angel's message in verity." May He save us from  
repeating "our" lack of discernment of  
a century ago!

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## Key to Abbreviations

BC	<i>Ellen White Comments in SDA Bible Commentary</i>
CG	<i>Child Guidance</i>
DA	<i>The Desire of Ages</i>
ED	<i>Education</i>
GC	<i>Great Controversy</i>
GCB	<i>General Conference Bulletin</i>
MH	<i>Ministry of Healing</i>
MM	<i>Medical Ministry</i>
RH	<i>Review and Herald</i>
SD	<i>Sons and Daughters of God</i>
SM	<i>Selected Messages</i>
ST	<i>Signs of the Times</i>
T	<i>Testimonies for the Church</i>

## DO WE HAVE A PROBLEM?

**Yes! Here we have a Baby different from any other ever born into this world.** This little Fellow is pure, sinless, sweet, unselfish—no temper tantrums. As a Baby, no problem to His mother. And according to Isaiah 9:6 (which tells us “unto us a child is born”) “the government” of earth and heaven is laid “upon His shoulder.”

Get it? That’s the shoulder of a helpless Infant who can’t yet hold His bottle! If He as a Child falls into our universal sin, that “government” will crash. Everything has come to depend on Him and His perfect sinlessness, while He is born “*unto us*” who all are sinners.

How and why is He so different from all other babies?

**Roman Catholicism claims it has the answer:** “His sinlessness is because He has been born of a sinless Mother who experienced an Immaculate Conception in the womb of *her* mother. This broke the genetic link and gave her a sinless nature all *her* life so she never knew sexual desire. Thus she gave to Him her sinless, sexless flesh or nature.”

Some Seventh-day Adventists also answer that Jesus couldn’t be sinless as a baby unless He had been “exempt” from the common genetic inheritance all our babies have to share.

**Could there be another solution?** “Though he was in the form of God,” Christ left His home in heaven and “emptied himself” to be “born in the likeness of men [and] humbled himself” (Phil. 2:7, 8, RSV). Is it possible that He “took” or “assumed” the same heredity of fallen, sinful flesh, the same nature that all humanity has, and yet was sinless as a baby?

The angel told the Virgin Mary that He is “that holy thing which shall be born of thee.” Paul says He was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Luke 1:30; Heb. 7:26). And Ellen White speaks of His sinless babyhood:

Christ ... was not like all children .... His inclination to right was a constant gratification to His parents .... No one, looking upon the childlike countenance, shining with animation, could say that Christ was just like other children (5BC 1117).

One temper tantrum would have made Him a sinner; and that would have destroyed Him as a Saviour because He would then have had “an evil propensity.” A sinful “savior” couldn’t save anybody. The question is, *Why* was He so different as a baby?

**The problem is not trivial.** It’s way beyond mere theological contention. Ellen White tells us that “the humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden chain that binds our souls to God” (ISM 144). It must have something important to do with our day to day Christian living.

Our Roman Catholic friends also think they see “the humanity of the Son of God” as “everything” to *them*. They have been pondering this problem for well over a thousand years. That’s why they came up with their idea of an “Immaculate Conception” for His mother. For them, this must be a pre-programmed genetic “exemption” from the hereditary stream of fallen mankind. Their idea is a holy separation, the opposite of identity with us. He must not be allowed to come too close to the problem of human sin.

In other words, Mary must have holy flesh so she can pass it on to her Son, so He can come into the world with a

sinless nature *unlike* ours. For Roman Catholics, this answers our question: as a baby Christ couldn't help being good, long before He could reason or think. There was no genetic link with the fallen Adam.

We naturally assume a baby can't reason, can't judge between right and wrong; and it's also true that all our babies are born sinners, by nature selfish. So, do we need that "exemption" for Jesus that excused Him from the legacy that all other babies receive?

Thoughtful Seventh-day Adventists are perplexed. Some see no way for Christ to have been sinless as a baby unless He was "exempt" from our heredity. This idea is usually designated as "pre-Fall," that is, Christ "had" the sinless spiritual nature of Adam before the Fall, *unlike* ours.

Others (equally thoughtful) see that Christ accepted our full human heredity from the beginning of His incarnation and "took" upon Himself the same burden of our genetic download of sinfulness, yet was holy and sinless even as a baby, and all His life. This is known as the "post-Fall" position, and is identical to the 1888 message view.

Protestants in general say they reject the Immaculate Conception dogma, but they also demand some "exemption" somewhere in the genetic line for Jesus. They still carry considerable baggage from Rome such as Sunday sacredness and the natural immortality of the soul. Is their view of Christ's humanity also borrowed from Rome?

**The Bible and Ellen White's writings are clear.** Jesus "took" or "assumed" our fallen, sinful nature, an idea diametrically opposed to both the Immaculate Conception and the "exempt" idea. The problem that has occupied centuries of discussion finds its focus in Christ's sinlessness as a baby. How could "the government" be upon His "shoulder" even then? Let us rever-

ently inquire why. If there is an answer to our question, it must be part of the Good News of the gospel.



## **IS IT REALLY ALL THAT IMPORTANT?**

**Is truth or error important?** Many informed Seventh-day Adventists know we've had a decided polarizing of views for the better part of half a century.

Indeed, the problem goes back as far as a century, for the 1888 messengers, Jones and Waggoner, were emphatic in understanding that Christ took our fallen, sinful nature, yet lived therein a perfectly sinless life, and was totally sinless. Their view was opposed at the time, and still is. Some today say they like the "general emphasis" in their "most precious message" but insist they were in error on this point.

Other conscientious writers struggle to come up with a harmony of the two opposite views. At the Palmdale Conference of early 1976 it became apparent that it was impossible to bridge them, so the General Conference declared both acceptable.

**But neither side have been happy to back away.** Those who hold that Christ "had" a sinless nature keep wondering if there is some potential blasphemy lurking in the post-Fall idea. Does it disqualify Christ from being our sinless Substitute, so that we must end up not having a Saviour? This is the implied suggestion of several recent Adventist writers:

Could Jesus have had the very same nature that we receive from sinful Adam and still be our Saviour? ... Could Jesus save babies born with the "inheritance" of "selfishness ... wrought in" their "very being" if He had been born with the same "inheritance" of "selfishness"? ... Could Jesus have a nature just like ours and still be our interceding advocate and high priest? ... Could Jesus intercede for us if His human nature was

also defiled and corrupt? (Woodrow Whidden II, *Ellen White on the Humanity of Christ*, pp. 71, 72; Review and Herald, 1997).

If He were altogether like us – 100% – if He had shared in exactly the same way the inheritance of sin and guilt we all received from Adam, then He would have been crippled as a Saviour. But more than that, He would Himself have stood in need of a Redeemer (Roy Adams, *The Nature of Christ*, p. 71; Review and Herald, 1994).

How can one say that Christ took human nature after 4,000 years of degeneration and yet remained uninfected by this malady, this cancer, this virus that has certainly infected all of us? (p. 68).

Both of these authors apparently misconstrue the 1888 view which they oppose, but we will not take time here to discuss the distortions.<sup>1</sup> Adams answers his own rhetorical question a few pages later with reasoning that has to closely resemble the Roman Catholic view: Before His birth Christ “bypass[ed] this universal infection of sin” and was “excepted” from our “inherited” legacy (p. 71). It was like a freeway “bypass” that saves you going through town. He believes Ellen White agrees with him when she says that Christ “coming to dwell in humanity, receives no pollution” (DA 266). The question is: what does “receives” mean? Does it “bypass” the exercise of His own human will?

Her statement hardly helps solve the “sinless as a baby” problem, for she is not speaking of a genetically inherited “exception” or “exemption” for Christ that bypassed His own human will and gave Him sinless flesh, but how the Great Physician as an adult touched the lepers and “received no defilement.” The meaning seems clear: “coming to dwell in humanity” *Christ*

*never sinned*. He couldn't come "to dwell in humanity" if He avoided identity with humanity where humanity is.

Those who believe the 1888 view see that to "except" Christ genetically from having to meet the problem of sin in a nature or flesh *like* ours logically compromises His victory over Satan. Jesus cannot be excused from our battle as we must fight it. The 1888 view sees an antinomianism lurking in the pre-Fall view that is contrary to the gospel. If the Saviour can't "overcome" or "condemn" sin if He "takes" our fallen sinful spiritual nature, how can *we* ever hope to overcome? The bottom line? *We can't*. Follow the logic through all the way, and it becomes serious.

Jones and Waggoner both recognized that this view is at least next door to the Roman Catholic view, if not logically identical. They saw Christ as a Baby partaking of the same genetic inheritance that all the sons and daughters of both "David" and "Abraham" have had to take, all the way from Adam (Rom. 1:3; Heb. 2:16, the word "seed" is *sperm* in Greek).

But that doesn't mean that He had to be a sinner like we are. And the Good News, they said, is that we with our fallen, sinful heredity can overcome by faith in Him, "even as [He] overcame" (Rev. 3:21). They saw it as Good News that makes good sense when you think about getting ready for the second coming of Christ.

When discussions take place (as they inevitably do), the question always comes up: if that's true, how could Christ be sinless as a baby before He reached the age of accountability? His holiness as an infant is a problem. It must have been natural, non-volitional, "exempt" from our genetic inheritance that does program our babies (and all of us!) to selfishness and temper tantrums and all kinds of sin.

Is there an answer that Roman Catholicism and our Protestant friends haven't thought of? If we find it, surely it must be Good News. The 1888 message points toward an answer.

**Let's Define Our Terms:**

**WHAT WAS CHRIST'S PERFECTLY  
SINLESS HUMAN NATURE?**

**There was no sin in Him.** That's the simplest possible definition. Several classic statements follow:

That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God (Luke 1:30). Holy, harmless, un-defiled, separate from sinners (Heb. 7:26).

In taking upon Himself man's nature in its fallen condition, Christ did not in the least participate in its sin. ... We should have no misgivings in regard to the perfect sinlessness of the human nature of Christ (5BC 1131).

It is a mystery that is left unexplained to mortals that Christ could be tempted in all points like as we are, and yet be without sin.... Let every human being be warned from the ground of making Christ altogether human, such an one as ourselves; for it cannot be. ... On not one occasion was there a response to [Satan's] manifold temptations. Not once did Christ step on Satan's ground, to give him any advantage (ibid., pp. 1128, 1129).

When Ellen White speaks of the "perfect sinlessness of the human nature of Christ" she surrounds her statements with various verbs of volition. Christ "did not *participate* ... in sin," He "*knew* no sin," He did not "*sin*," "had the *head* of Christ been touched, the hope of the human race would have perished." No "taint of, or inclination to corruption *rested* upon Christ," and He in no "way *yielded* to corruption." "On not one occasion was there a *response* to [Satan's] manifold temptations. Not once did Christ *step* on Satan's ground." Not once did He "*give* him any advantage."

That does not mean that she defined “sin” as only outward acts, but it seems clear that volition has to be involved in Christ’s perfect sinlessness. A constant choice of righteousness requires an inner state of sinlessness, a holiness of heart that was basic to His outward character.

These expressions make clear how Christ “had” no “propensities of sin,” or how “not for one moment was there in Him an evil propensity.”<sup>1</sup> In her idea of Christ’s sinless nature, it would not be a matter of exemption from genetic inheritance, but of no “participation” in sin. Thus His nature was perfectly sinless.

But we all assume that newborn babies aren’t capable of deciding any kind of a “verb” of volition. Therefore it is easy to conclude that He must need some “exemption” for His sinlessness as a baby.

**But we must ask:** *is sin itself transmitted genetically?* To say that “all have sinned” (except Christ) does not prove that it is. One genuine exception would have to disprove the assumption. And if we understand this correctly, one such exception would prove that all our continued sinning is unnecessary. Generations of belief in original sin must not prejudice us. As Adventists we should learn from the 1844 “Great Disappointment” our lesson not to assume that theological concepts we have inherited from Christendom are necessarily true (the naive assumption that the earth is the “sanctuary” led to the pain of the Great Disappointment). Thus chastened, we can give “original sin” some close scrutiny.

Unless Ellen White was given to a Jesuitical use of ambiguous language, we must accept her teaching that in His incarnation Jesus received no programmed “exemption” from our normal genetic heredity from the fallen Adam:

It would have been an almost infinite humiliation for the Son of God to take man’s nature, even when Adam stood in his

innocence in Eden. But Jesus accepted humanity when the race had been weakened by four thousand years of sin. Like every child of Adam He accepted the results of the working of the great law of heredity. What these results were is shown in the history of His earthly ancestors (DA 49).

Christ did not make-believe take human nature; He did verily take it. He did in reality possess human nature. "As the *children* [not Adam] are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same," He was the Son of Mary; He was of the seed of David according to human descent. (5BC 1130; emphasis supplied here and in all quotations hereafter).

The consistent testimony of Scripture is the same. Never do we find a hint that Christ was given any "exemption." Note the pile-driving repetition in Scripture (*italics supplied*):

God [sent] His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh (Rom. 8:3).

Concerning His son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed [*sperm, Greek*] of David according to the flesh (Rom. 1:3).

We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death. ... It became Him ... to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren. ... Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy Him that had the power of death. ... For verily He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed [*sperm, Greek*] of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren. ... In that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted (Heb. 2:2-18).

Here was Paul's golden opportunity to emphasize the *unlikeness* of Christ to our genetic inheritance, to point out how

He was different from us in the nature which He received “of the seed [*sperm*] of David.” But Paul details a perfect likeness with us through the fallen sinful “sperm” of mankind.

But in Christ “is no sin” for He “knew no sin.” “His head” was not “touched” by the tempter, only “His heel.” His “heel” was ours, our flesh; but His mind was His—“holy, harmless, undefiled.” He Himself was His holy, righteous character, whereas He clothed Himself with “the likeness” of our sinful flesh.

**But what is sin?** Certainly something far deeper than outward acts or words, even than thoughts. It is deep heart-alienation from God, not merely spiritual separation from Him, but actual heart-enmity against Him.

We can see this truth defined at the cross. Christ sinlessly experienced *spiritual separation* from God for He cried out, “My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” But His heart was “not for one moment” at *enmity* with Him. Separation from God need not force one to sin. Christ’s painful experience in forsakenness gave Him the same excuse for enmity against God that all of us have used, but He chose to say No to it. He would not let separation become alienation. He believes in God even in total darkness.

There enters into the picture now a new element that has never been present in any other baby ever born into this world. Christ was *agape* in human flesh because “God is *agape*,” says John (1 John 4:8). Thus His perfect sinlessness as a baby meant that He was always in heart-union with His Father. In Him there was a joining together of humanity’s legacy of sinfulness with that divine quality of *agape* which forthwith “condemned sin in the flesh.” This special kind of love always creates a cross when it meets the problem of sin in human nature, and on that cross self is crucified. In Him, God did not run away from our battle; He met it head-on.

The result?

He “took” our “flesh with all its liabilities” but solved the problem of “sin *in* the flesh” (Rom. 8:3).

The contrast between the two views is interesting. One says that Christ could not be our sinless Substitute, our Saviour from sin, our interceding High Priest, if He comes too close to us for He would then have been forced to sin. If sin is rooted in human flesh, it is invincible. The devil’s invention of sin is too strong for God to deal with if He comes too close to it. (Logically therefore, this view would yield the great controversy to the enemy).

The other view sees that Christ could not be our Substitute and Saviour unless He *does* come close to us by identifying with us where we are, and solving that problem of sin right where it is, in our fallen, sinful nature. He has to be our second Adam, the new Head of the *fallen* human race. He cannot save what He does not take or assume. He cannot win a sham victory.

Now, back to our question: could that work of condemning sin “in the likeness of sinful flesh” have begun in Christ’s babyhood?

If not, when did it begin?

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<sup>1</sup> An evil propensity is more than a leaning toward sin, a tendency toward it, or an inclination toward it. These leanings constitute temptations, but they can be resisted and denied. Jesus felt the pressure of all our leanings, tendencies, and inclinations, “yet without sin” because He denied them all. An evil propensity is a desire for sin which has been cherished and *fulfilled*. There was no evil propensity in Jesus’ mind which always purposed to be righteous, “even unto the death of the cross.”



## **THE ONE SINLESS BABY OF ALL HISTORY**

**The most interesting Character of all time!** As Christ was conceived of the Holy Spirit, God had to be His Father from the earliest moment of conception. But “unto *us* a child is born.” He becomes a member of our fallen race.

This divine paternity did indeed impart to Him an advantage that no other human baby has ever had. But we must not misunderstand. When we have the faith of Jesus, we have the same advantage. If this were not true, all the inspired statements we read about Christ being our “example” would be meaningless. *Christ never knew that He had this advantage except by faith* (DA 81, 82). The “advantage” was not an “exemption” from our human nature or flesh; it was a joining of the divine nature to our fallen sinful nature. That’s what made all the difference.

Further, His so-called “advantage” did not excuse Him from our most terrible conflicts with temptation to sin. If anything, His “advantage” in being conceived of the Holy Spirit only exposed Him to a far more severe conflict than any fallen descendant of Adam has ever had to meet. Seen this way, His “advantage” can be understood as a disadvantage.

Neither did His divine paternity impart to Him any pre-programmed character as such, for His life was to be a life of faith:

Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered. And being made perfect, He became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him (Heb. 5:8, 9).

Christ, coming to earth as man, lived a holy life, and developed a perfect character (DA 762).

He rendered perfect obedience to His Father's commandments. In coming to the world in human form, in becoming subject to the law, in revealing to men that He bore their sickness, their sorrow, their guilt, He did not become a sinner (SD 25).

He "developed" a perfect character through constant conflict with temptations to sin. Just how did His "advantage" operate? A Scriptural principle may help us understand:

In every converted soul a battle is waged continually between two motivations—one to evil, and the other to holiness. One comes from the genetic inheritance of a sinful nature (and in our case by our own cultivated tendencies to evil); the other is supplied by the working of the Holy Spirit who contends against these evil motivations.

Christ being the God-man, He experienced this same constant conflict. Having never sinned, He had no "evil *propensity*," no *cultivated* tendencies to evil—which are sin. But because He inherited our genetic nature through His human mother, He knew the strength of the motivations to evil that constantly assail us. Not only did He in reality (not merely vicariously) bear our fallen, sinful flesh; He also "his own self bare *our sins in his own body on the tree*," "made to be sin for us" (1 Pet. 2:24; 2 Cor. 5:21). Those who maintain that Christ was "exempt" from battling with the terrible power of sinful addictions need to consider what Peter says. If you are any kind of an addict (and who isn't an addict to sin?), take heart; *you have a Saviour who overcame in your flesh and knows the strength of your addiction.*

Being conceived of the Holy Spirit, Jesus also knew the motivation to holiness that it is our privilege to know through faith. But being conceived of the Holy Spirit did not force Him

automatically to be righteous. His “advantage” only enabled Him to choose freely:

Unless there is a possibility of yielding, temptation is no temptation. Temptation is resisted when man is powerfully influenced to do a wrong action and, knowing that he can do it, resists, by faith, with a firm hold upon divine power. This was the ordeal through which Christ passed. ... In His closing hours, while hanging upon the cross, He experienced to the fullest extent what man must experience when striving against sin (5BC 1082). [Yes, He knew the strength of the terrible struggle addicts have.]

As a free agent, He was placed on probation, with liberty to yield to Satan’s temptations and work at cross-purposes with God (idem).

In other words, Christ was “programmed” neither toward sin nor toward holiness; but He felt the full force of the undertow that has swept us all into sin and He simply refused to be swept into it. “He knows how strong are the inclinations of the natural heart” (5T 177).

**Sad to say, many have the gospel so backwards that they make it bad news.** Of these two conflicting motivations, almost everybody thinks the sinful-nature motivation is the stronger. They expect to be defeated by temptation, assuming that sin is stronger than the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome it. But this very assumption is itself the heart of sin, for it discloses an inner antagonism against the righteousness of God. Such a conviction is rooted in a heart-leaning toward the idea that God deserves defeat in the great controversy with Satan (this conviction may all the while be unconscious). We suppose our sin

is too strong for God, and so we demonstrate this conviction by thinking that it's impossible for "poor me" in *my* circumstances to obey the law of God; so we give in and yield to temptation. This is how sin functions.

Now it's a simple step further to declare that it would have been impossible for even Christ in His incarnation to obey the law of God if He had "taken" our same sinful nature and been tempted in our identical circumstances. If we can't overcome, then of course He can't—unless He is given that special "exemption."

Here is the fulcrum of defeat, disclosing why the nature of Christ is a spiritual life-or-death matter. This is the root of our deep beneath-the-surface sympathy with Satan's charges, for if sin is really stronger than the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome it and condemn it in our fallen, sinful flesh, then Satan has to be right in his campaign against the government of God. Then that government must crash. A vote in Satan's favor is itself the essence of sin. We can't be neutral; we will "vote" one way or the other by our faith or by our unbelief.

**A Scripture principle may help us settle this issue.** It may give us some very Good News. Paul insists that the Holy Spirit is the stronger of the two conflicting motivations that we all experience. Christ had to experience them as well. In the following passage please note carefully what it is that "ye cannot do." Is it *good* things or *bad* things? You can't sit on the fence; it's not both. Your answer is important:

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth [strives] against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would (Gal. 5:16, 17).

If one takes the position that “ye cannot do” the *good* things that “ye would” even when we choose to “walk in the Spirit,” then he has a most discouraging kind of religion! In that case he might just as well give up and resign himself to defeat. Many reason that way and yield to Satan because they have picked up Bad News.

**Surely Paul doesn’t support such defeatism!** He says that what we “cannot do” is the *evil* “things that ye would” that are prompted or motivated by our inherited sinful nature and our own cultivated evil propensities. And he tells us why: the Holy Spirit “strives against the flesh” *and He is stronger*. Stronger even than our own cultivated tendencies to evil, the result of years of our own bad habit! If this isn’t true, then there is no Good News.

No one questions that we cannot do the good things “ye would” if we walk “in the flesh.” But Paul is talking here about “*walking in the Spirit*.” Then he guarantees that we “shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” The flesh will “lust,” but in vain. It will knock on our door, yes, but we will say No. In the end, we are the boss!

The person who “walks in the Spirit” can of course choose to sin; but the beautiful truth is that if he exercises faith, he simply cannot do the evil things his carnal nature “would” prompt him to do. The victory was won in *our* flesh, which is the flesh of Christ in His incarnation. That battle in His flesh was fought in the corporate flesh of all humanity. Your flesh is Christ’s flesh. This is why Ellen White says that “the humanity of the Son of God is everything to us.”

The Holy Spirit imparted to Christ the same higher and stronger motivation at His conception that He imparts to us when we learn to believe. None of us is born believing; but Christ was. And before we hastily conclude that His “advantage” excuses our continued participation in sin, let’s remember

that if we will “walk in the Spirit” the same higher motivation will cancel within us *our captivity* to those “desires of the flesh and of the mind” which are both addictions and propensities to evil. We’ll still have to face them in temptation, but now we face them only as triumphant victors.

What Christ “took” or “assumed” is this:

In all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren. ... For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted (Heb. 2:14-18).

Christ did not make-believe take human nature; He did verily take it. He did in reality possess human nature. (Hebrews 2:14 quoted) He was the Son of Mary; He was of the seed of David according to human descent. He is declared to be a man, even the man Christ Jesus (*idem*).

He took upon His sinless nature our sinful nature, that He might know how to succor those that are tempted (MM 181).

Note the constant repetition of the verb “took.” Our full battle is from both within and without. “The Christian is to realize that... his strongest temptations will come from within; for he must battle against the inclinations of the natural heart. The Lord knows our weaknesses” (*Christ Tempted As We Are*, 11).

But how could an infant, even a Holy Infant, “battle against the inclinations of the natural heart”? How could He resist the impulses of the flesh? How could He know “the desires of the flesh” and yet not fulfill them? “Christ was not like all children. ... He was God in human flesh” (5BC 116, 1117).

The passage cited goes on to say that His divine paternity gave Him an instant insight into the nature of the temptation He was experiencing. Though He was a “free moral agent with liberty to work at cross purposes with God,” the point is that Christ “refused decidedly” to do so. Note again:

It is not correct to say, as many writers have said, that Christ was like all children. He was not like all children. Many children are misguided and mismanaged. ... His inclination to right was a constant gratification to His parents. ...

No one, looking upon the childlike countenance, shining with animation, could say that Christ was just like other children. He was God in human flesh. When urged by His companions to do wrong, divinity flashed through humanity, and He refused decidedly. In a moment He distinguished between right and wrong, and placed sin in the light of God’s command, holding up the law as a mirror which reflected light upon wrong. It was this keen discrimination between right and wrong that often provoked Christ’s brothers to anger (*idem*).

**What this does not say is important:** It does not say that His divine paternity excused Christ from the full force of our temptations. Rather, “in a moment He distinguished between right and wrong.” It does not say that Christ felt no motivation, no allurements, toward wrong; but it says that He had “keen discrimination between right and wrong” and chose the right immediately. It does not say that He did not take our sinful fallen nature, or that He did not know the “desires of the flesh;” it says that when He was tempted “He refused decidedly” to give in to them.

Who will dare say that an infant cannot “refuse decidedly” in any capacity that an infant can experience? We all know babies that “refuse decidedly” to eat this or that, or to go to sleep, or to be quiet; why can’t this Holy Infant “refuse decidedly” to yield to the impatient, rebellious, and therefore sinful feeling or spirit that all we as babies give in to? Why can’t He with an infantile “sanctified will” refuse to indulge the impulse to a temper tantrum? If there are human temptations we know, are there not infantile temptations? The fact that such are beyond our conscious recall does not mean they do not exist.

If “that holy thing” that was born of the Virgin Mary was holy in His most mature moment as He hung upon His cross, why can’t He be holy in His infancy? And if we concede that at any time in His earthly life He was “sent in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh,” why can’t He begin that glorious work at His conception when he “began life”? If not, when did He begin that work?

We speak often of what we term “the age of accountability.” We assume that children can be excused for selfish sin up to some period of age level; but could this be another legacy from Babylon that does not have divine authority? Ellen White seems to believe that there is no age too early for our children to become a Christian:

An eminent divine was once asked how old a child must be before there was reasonable hope of his being a Christian. “Age has nothing to do with it,” was the answer.

“Love to Jesus, trust, repose, confidence, are all qualities that agree with the child’s nature. As soon as a child can love and trust his mother, then can he love and trust Jesus as the Friend of his mother. Jesus will be his friend, loved and honored.”



In view of the foregoing truthful statement, can parents be too careful in presenting precept and example before those watchful little eyes and sharp senses? (CG 486).

When did Jesus begin to have “watchful little eyes and sharp senses”? If it is a “truthful statement” that “age has nothing to do with it,” both prenatal and postnatal influences are important. The world owes much to Mary and Joseph, for they, and “especially Mary, kept before them the remembrance of their child’s divine Fatherhood” (5BC 1116).

**It must be true that Mary did not involve her unborn Infant in violent, hateful, passionate, evil propensities.**

Although we have not had the advantage of a divine paternity and an ideal prenatal environment for nine months, praise God that faith in Christ will this moment deliver us from *captivity* to “the law of sin which is in my members” (Rom. 7:23). The victory was won in Christ’s human flesh in both His entire life and in His death upon the cross. That means that no addict can ever have as severe a struggle as He had, “who his own self bare our sins *in his own body* on the tree” (1 Pet. 2:24, emphasis mine). What did He bear? *Your addiction*. Your *sin*. Your *bad habits*. Don’t say the victory is not for you; it’s yours for believing the truth because it was won in your flesh. Ellen White gets to the heart of the problem:

Jesus Christ is our example in all things. He began life, passed through its experiences, and ended its record, with a sanctified human will. He was tempted in all points like as we are and yet because He kept His will surrendered and sanctified, He never bent in the slightest degree toward the doing of evil, or toward manifesting rebellion against God. ... Those who have a sanctified will, that is in unison with the will of Christ, will day

by day have their wills bound to the will of Christ. ... The one absorbing aim of the life of Christ was to do the will of His heavenly Father. *He did not become offended with God*; for He lived not to please himself. The human will of Christ would not have led Him ... to endure humiliation, scorn, reproach, suffering, and death. His human nature shrank from all these things as decidedly as ours shrinks from them (ST, Oct. 29, 1894).

### **This tells us something important:**

(a) Christ had a will of His own that “shrank” from sacrificial obediences to the Father “as decidedly as ours shrinks from them.” *That’s* something significant!

(b) He denied His “own will,” for He lived not to please Himself.

(c) He kept His own will surrendered and sanctified through a choice to self-denial.

(d) Thus “He never *bent* in the slightest degree toward the *doing* of evil, or toward *manifesting* rebellion against God” because He refused to be “offended with” Him, even though He had every human reason to believe God had “forsaken” Him unjustly (see Matt 27:46; Ps. 22:1-6).

(e) This “example” of surrendering His own will and “cherishing a holy will” had to *begin with His earliest moment of Incarnation*. That’s when He “began life.”

How He could do so as a fetus or an infant is of course a “mystery,” but with deep reverence we must confess that it is true—*He did*. Being conceived of the Holy Spirit, the holy motivation of *agape* prevailed over the evil motivations that have swept us all into sin. That same holy motivation will prevail over our evil ones as we “walk in the Spirit” living a life of faith before them.

Whatever conflict or “striving” there was in Christ’s prenatal experience or in His infancy was of course infantile. The

holiness of His Father was reproduced in Him through His infantile faith at that earliest moment when He “began life.” The following well summarizes our findings thus far:

As through Christ every human being has life, so also through Him every soul receives some ray of divine light. Not only intellectual but spiritual power, a perception of right, a desire for goodness, exists in every heart. But against these principles there is struggling an antagonistic power. The result of the eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is manifest in every man’s experience. There is in his nature a bent to evil, a force which, unaided, he cannot resist. To withstand this force, to attain that ideal which in his inmost soul he accepts as alone worthy, he can find help in but one power. That power is Christ (ED 29).

Did Christ come to succor us *where* our problem lies? Or did He merely do some “paper work” millions of light years away from us wholly unrelated to the real problem of the inner conflict we face?

Unless He demonstrates here within the hearts of those who believe in Him a “power” to “withstand this force” of inner temptation, the problem of sin will never be solved through all eternity, and the “government” of God will fail. Apart from Him, humans have no solution. But this victory which He accomplished “in His flesh” will be reproduced in His people in their flesh. The following vividly discloses the reality of His conflict:

In behalf of the race, with the weaknesses of fallen man upon Him, He [Christ] was to stand the temptations of Satan upon all points wherewith man would be assailed. ...

In order to elevate fallen man, Christ must reach him where he was. He took human nature, and bore the infirmities and degeneracy of the race. He, who knew no sin, became sin for us. He humiliated Himself to the lowest depths of human woe, that He might be qualified to reach man, and bring him up from the degradation in which sin had plunged him (5BC 1081).

Temptation is resisted when man is powerfully influenced to do a wrong action and, knowing that he can do it, resists, by faith, with a firm hold upon divine power. This was the ordeal through which Christ passed. ... In His closing hours, while hanging upon the cross, He experienced to the fullest extent what man must experience when striving against sin. He realized how bad a man may become by yielding to sin.... The iniquity of the whole world was upon Him (ibid., p. 1082).

Christ knew a temptation, felt a force within, that unfallen Adam never could have felt:

Adam was tempted by the enemy, and he fell. It was not indwelling sin which caused him to yield; for God made him pure and upright in His own image. He was as faultless as the angels before the throne. There was in him no corrupt principles, no tendencies to evil. But when Christ came to meet the temptation of Satan, He bore "the likeness of sinful flesh" (ST, Oct. 17, 1900).

It cannot be blasphemy to confess that He "condemned sin in the flesh." But if we "exempt" Him from struggling with the same "antagonistic power" that our fallen flesh struggles with, and if we claim only a sham victory for Him, we come terribly close.

This truth of Christ's victory in "the likeness of sinful flesh" is wonderful Good News for us who are battling with sin in *our* sinful flesh.

## HOW DEEP IS SIN IN HUMAN NATURE?

**And how deep is Christ's cleansing from it?** The well-known definition of sin is "transgression of the law." The one Greek word translated by that phrase in 1 John 3:4 is *anomia*, which means *a state* of enmity against God's law, not merely *an act*. "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores" (Isa. 1:5, 6). "I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps. 51:5).

But Paul makes clear that the possession (or assumption) of a sinful nature is not itself sin. Many superficially assume that anyone who has a sinful nature must automatically participate in sin. It *is* true that all the fallen sons and daughters of Adam have done so, but it is not true of Him who "took on Him the seed of Abraham," who "was made of the seed of David according to the flesh" yet was "without sin." And those who will "live in the sight of a holy God without a Mediator" through the time of trouble will still retain their "sinful flesh" while having overcome "even as [Christ] overcame" (cf. GC 425, 614, 623). Note how Paul emphasizes that sin is volition rather than genetic inheritance:

In time past ye *walked* according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of *disobedience*, among whom also we *conducted ourselves* in times past in the lusts of our flesh, *fulfilling* the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and *were by nature* the children of wrath, even as others (Eph. 2:2-3).

**Sin is not possessing a nature that is tempted by the “desires of our flesh.”** It is “*fulfilling* the desires of the flesh and of the mind.” To argue otherwise is to support the “holy flesh” heresy:

The teaching given in regard to what is termed “holy flesh” is an error. All may obtain holy hearts, but it is not correct to claim in this life to have holy flesh. ... While we cannot claim perfection of the flesh, we may have Christian perfection of the soul (GCB 1901, 419).

**Because we have sinful flesh or nature, we know “desires” that arise from within our “flesh.”** But nevertheless by the grace of Christ we can have “holy hearts” – we need not *fulfill* these “desires.” Those who “*walk* according to the course of this world,” the “children of *disobedience*,” who “*conduct them-selves* ... in the lusts of our flesh, *fulfilling* the desires of the flesh and of the mind ... [are] by *nature* the children of wrath.” We are locked into “wrath” as the result of our choices of disobedience.

Some assume that if Christ “took” our sinful spiritual nature He would also be automatically “by nature a child of wrath,” and must die for His own sin. But this is not true if He “condemned sin in the flesh” and chose to say “no” to temptation. “All have sinned,” says Paul, that is “all” “*fulfilled* the desires of the flesh and of the [carnal] mind.” This gives us “propensities of sin” which Christ did not have because He did not “*fulfill the desires* of the flesh”:

Never, in any way, leave the slightest impression upon human minds that a taint of, or inclination to, corruption *rested upon* Christ, or that He in any way *yielded* to corruption. ... His faith ... did not *waver* for one moment. ... On not one occasion was there a *response* to [Satan’s] manifold temptations. Not once did Christ *step* on Satan’s ground, to *give* him any advantage (5BC 1128, 1129).

This should explain Ellen White's statement, "Not for one moment was there in Him an evil propensity." Our yielding to evil desires has pervaded every aspect of our being so that "from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness" in us. Not so with Him.

*Anomia* is almost always translated "iniquity" in the KJV, once as "unrighteousness." Never is it used for the inheritance of a fallen, sinful nature. In 2 Corinthians 6:14 it is equated with unbelief (Romans 14:23 actually gives us a deeper definition of sin, "whatsoever is not of faith is sin" and Christ's faith never "wavered"). In Matthew 7:23 and 13:41 *anomia* is something which one *works*. In Matthew 23:28 it is *hypocrisy*. In Matthew 24:12 *anomia* is said to *abound* (*pletho*, from which we get our word "plethora"), something inappropriate to say of the sinful nature.

In all other places in the New Testament, *anomia* is volitional heart-*rebellion* against God. It depicts that heart attitude deep within the psychic recesses of the soul that is enmity against the law of God. That holy law is expressed as *agape* (Rom. 13:10; 8:7). If faith is understood as a heart-appreciation of *agape*, it must follow that sin is our profound, universal, natural-born heart-*resistance* to *agape*. Such *anomia* naturally bears fruit in disobedience to the law of God in purpose, feeling, thought, choice, and deed.

Ellen White also describes *anomia* as sinful "feelings and motives, as well as the outward acts. ... The books of heaven record the sins that would have been committed had there been opportunity" (5BC 1085). This is a seething within, waiting only an opportunity to flare forth without. But this is volitional, and not to be equated with the inheritance of *tendencies* or a *bent* toward sin which can be denied or "condemned." Note the following (the words expressing volition are emphasized):



The sin of evil speaking begins with the *cherishing* of evil thoughts. ... An impure thought *tolerated*, an unholy desire *cherished*, and the soul is *contaminated*, its integrity *compromised*. ... If we would not commit sin, we must *shun* its very beginnings. Every emotion and desire must be *field in subjection* to reason and conscience. Every unholy thought must be instantly *repelled*. ...

By faith and prayer all may meet the requirements of the gospel. No man can be forced to *transgress*. His own *consent* must be first gained; the soul must *purpose* the sinful act, before passion can *dominate* over reason, or iniquity *triumph* over conscience. Temptation, however strong, is never an excuse for *sin*. ... The Lord ... knows how strong are the inclinations of the natural heart, and He will help in every time of temptation (5T 177).

Temptations will pour in upon us; for by them we are to be tried during our probation upon earth. This is the proving of God, a revelation of our own hearts. There is no sin in having temptations; but sin comes in when temptation is *yielded* to (4T 358).

Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lusts and enticed. He is turned away from the course of virtue and real good by *following* his own inclinations. ... It is Satan's act to tempt you, but your own act to *yield*. It is not in the power of all the host of Satan to force the tempted to *transgress* (4T 623).

Satan ... cannot force men to do evil. He tempts them to it, and makes sin look enticing and pleasant; but he has to leave it to their own wills whether they *will* do it or

not. ... Man is a free moral agent to *accept* or *refuse* (2T 294).

Pure religion has to do with the *will*. ... The will is not the taste or the inclination, but it is the deciding power, which *works* in the children of men unto obedience to God, or unto disobedience (5T 513).

Unless Christ should *consent* to temptation, He could not be overcome. ... The tempter can never *compel* us to do evil. He cannot *control* minds unless they are *yielded* to his control. The will must *consent*, faith must *let go* its hold upon Christ, before Satan can exercise his power upon us. But every sinful desire we *cherish* affords him a foothold (DA 125).

Although the “orthodox” Catholic and Protestant view is that sin is inherited genetically, Ellen White never uses the term “original sin” in a theological sense. Here is the only place where Ellen White uses the phrase “the original sin” (note that she uses it in a strictly historical, not theological sense, and note also how she emphasizes the manner of the transmission of sin throughout human history):

Through the medium of influence, taking advantage of the action of mind on mind, he [Satan] prevailed on Adam to sin. Thus at its very source human nature was corrupted. And ever since then sin has continued its hateful work, reaching from mind to mind. Every sin committed awakens the echoes of the original sin.

Mutual dependence is a wonderful thing. Reciprocal influence should be carefully studied. We should find out without doubt on what side we are exerting our

influence. When placed on the side of right, influence is a power for God; when placed on the side of evil, it is a power for Satan. One human being under Satan's control becomes a means of temptation to another human being. Thus evil grows into immense proportions (RH April 16, 1901).

Not one word in the article supports the idea of a genetic transmission of sin through biological reproduction. Yet while talking about "the original sin" this would have been Ellen White's golden opportunity to support the "orthodox" Catholic and Protestant view.

Note her emphasis: the transmission of sin in succeeding generations from Adam is specifically "through the medium of influence, ... reaching from mind to mind." She urges in this connection the "careful study" of "reciprocal influence." Through this means evil "grows into immense proportions," that is, "iniquity abounds." (Let us not forget that "influence" begins to play its part from the moment of conception; science abundantly confirms this.)

Paul comes his closest to "original sin" in the following:

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. ... Therefore as by the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of One the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous (Rom. 5:12, 18, 19).

So, Paul is as cautious as Ellen White! With her "lesser light" illuminating our darkened vision of "the greater light,"

Paul's passage appears in perfect harmony with the *Review and Herald* statement above. He is about to articulate "original sin" in verse 12 but he catches himself and says "death came by sin, and death passed upon all men." "I was just about to say," in effect, "that the phenomenon of death passing on all men requires a genetic transmission of sin and guilt through the genes and chromosomes—well, the truth is, all sinned!"<sup>1</sup> He may have come within a hair's breadth of articulating the doctrine of original sin, but he doesn't. The proponents of "original sin" mistakenly ask for the baptism of infants to wipe away its stain, but they fail to see how Paul says that whatever such stain is transmitted from Adam to the human race is canceled by Christ for the human race:

Therefore as by the offense of one [Adam] judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of One [Christ] the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life (Rom. 5:18, 19, KJV). So also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men (NIV).

Sin is transmitted through "mutual dependence," "the action of mind on mind ... reaching from mind to mind" so that "every sin committed awakens the echoes of the original sin." "Reciprocal influence should be carefully studied. ... Thus evil grows into immense proportions" (idem).<sup>2</sup>

**Summary:** There is no "exemption" for Christ as the holy embryo of an infant. From the time He "began life," He is free to "accept the results of the working of the great law of heredity," "yet without sin." He will not "participate" in our sin unless He is in *anomia* against God, whereas Paul in Romans 5:12 includes all of *us* in *anomia*. When he says "all sinned" he clearly means all "participated." For Christ to "take" or "assume" our full genetic

heredity does not make Him “altogether human, such an one as ourselves” “which cannot be,” for we have sinned, and He “did no sin.” We are only human; He is divine-human. “The perfect sinlessness of the human nature of Christ” is consistent with His acceptance of our full genetic heredity.

But how can Christ be perfectly sinless while He inherits our sinful nature through Mary?

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<sup>1</sup> E.H. (Jack) Sequeira understands *eph ho* differently, as meaning “in that” or “in whom all sinned” (citing the aorist tense). The literal rendering of the *Emphatic Diaglot* agrees: “As through one man sin entered into the world (in whom all sinned), and through sin, death; so also, death passed upon all men.” But in so translating the verse, it has to transpose the *eph ho* clause to another place, whereas in the original Greek it comes at the end of the verse. It is true that we are all incorporate “in Adam,” so that when he fell, we fell, as the aorist tense of the verb indicates. But it is also true that we have all repeated his fall. While the verb for “death passed on all men” (*dielthen*) is also aorist, as is the “all sinned” in Romans 3:23, the next verb of Romans 3:23 is in the present tense, “all *do* come short.” Therefore it seems evident that Paul recognizes both our corporate involvement in Adam’s sin as the human race, and our continuing volitional involvement in sin as individuals. In becoming man, Christ “took” upon Himself that full corporate identity “yet without sin,” that is, without participating volitionally in our sin.

<sup>2</sup> Pelagianism teaches that each baby is born into the world sinless and neutral, but becomes a sinner when he/she recognizes (as does the Bible) that we are born sinners and “go astray as soon as [we] be born.” (Ps. 58:3).” This is because we are conceived and born separated from God, devoid of agape, and thus are automatically selfish. And selfishness is sin.

**WHAT KIND OF  
PRENATAL INFLUENCE  
DID MARY GIVE TO JESUS?**

**Here's the happiest woman of all time.** Although the Roman Catholic dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary is obviously error, there is no need to assume that during the time she was pregnant with Jesus, Mary was living in sin, indulging unholy passions, subject to Satanic emotions, as are so many pregnant women. We read that God has always had "some" who have demonstrated perfection of character through the exercise of faith:

Some few in every generation from Adam resisted [Satan's] every artifice and stood forth as noble representatives of what it was in the power of man to do and to be – Christ working with human efforts, helping man in overcoming the power of Satan. ... Satan was greatly disturbed because these noble holy men stood untainted amid the moral pollution surrounding them, [and] perfected righteous characters (RH, March 3, 1874).

The Virgin Mary was obviously among these "some few." The story of the Annunciation in Luke 1:26-38 makes clear that she "believed," and for that reason alone was righteous – solely by faith. When the angel Gabriel made his announcement, she said: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word."

Through the Holy Spirit she [Mary] received wisdom to cooperate with the heavenly agencies in the devel-

opment of this child who could claim only God as His Father (DA 69).

The effect of prenatal influence is by many parents looked upon as a matter of little moment; but heaven does not so regard it (MH 372).

Even the babe in its mother's arms may dwell under the shadow of the Almighty through the faith of a praying mother (DA 512).

It may be difficult for us to grasp Mary's relationship to Christ's freedom from an "evil propensity" because we neglect the prenatal influence she gave Him. Countless artists have pictured her as a beautiful teenager in the stable at Bethlehem holding the Holy Baby in her young arms. But nothing in the Bible or the Spirit of Prophecy requires us to believe these Christmas cards. Roman Catholic teaching does insist that Mary was scarcely out of childhood:

In one of these rude dwellings [in Nazareth] there lives a girl of thirteen or so, Mary by name, who has already been given in marriage to a young carpenter near the age of 20. The actual ceremony has not taken place. The couple are betrothed and must wait even as long as a year before they come together as man and wife (Father Warren H. Rouse, O.F.M., in *The Southern Cross*, Diocesan paper for San Diego, Dec. 1973).

According to the customs of her time and people, Mary was probably no more than 14 when her parents arranged her marriage and Joseph was probably about 18 (Pastoral Letter of National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Nov. 1973).

If one takes into account certain Bible facts, there are grave problems in accepting this popular idea. Matthew speaks of Jesus' four "brothers" plus "sisters," making a total of at least six (Matt. 13:55, 56). John makes plain that Jesus' "brothers" were older than He – they were "the sons and daughters of Joseph" but not of Mary (John 7:3-5; cf. DA 87, 90). Obviously, Joseph's "sons and daughters" were by a previous marriage, and Mary was affianced to Joseph to be a stepmother to them. Later she became the natural mother of Jesus. *What widowed father of at least six motherless children could wisely select a teen-ager to be their stepmother, however beautiful she may have been?*

Mary herself discloses a detail of her life story that may help us realize that she could have been an older woman who had apparently been denied every Jewish woman's greatest desire – to be married and have a male child:

My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For He hath regarded *the low estate* of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed: For He that is mighty hath done to me great things (Luke 1:46-49).

The Greek word translated "low estate" is "humiliation" in Acts 8:33. There is no reason to accept the Catholic and popular Protestant view that Mary was a popular teenage girl when she gave birth to Jesus. She may well have been an older woman, perhaps even not beautiful, who knew the inner pain of rejection and "humiliation," and yet who had overcome her self-pity and developed a beautiful faith. She was the mother of One who Himself became "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." She suggests that maybe she was also "acquainted with grief." For sure, she had an enormous capacity for sorrow, because old Simeon told her in the Temple that a gigantic



“sword” as big as Goliath’s “shall pierce through thy own soul” (Luke 2:35; LXX uses that word for Goliath’s sword). How could the Lord let that happen to an innocent woman unless she had been specially trained to endure pain and sorrow?

The newly pregnant Mary could find only one friend in whom to confide her glorious secret—a woman who had also known sorrow, “well stricken in years” (cf. Luke 1:7 concerning Elizabeth). This could indicate that Mary was herself a mature woman seeking such companionship.

The Bible facts support the view that Mary was among those “some few in every generation ... [who] perfected righteous characters.” Thus the prenatal influence she gave to Christ did not involve Him in participation with human passions of anger, unbelief, or hatred as so often is the case with unhappy, rebellious, evil-tempered, drug or alcohol-addicted pregnant mothers.

Elizabeth gives us a clue into what made Mary so outstanding: “Blessed is she *that believed*” (Luke 1:45). Roman Catholic error is always a clever counterfeit that hides an important truth that otherwise we might neglect. Their dogma of the Immaculate Conception seeks to hide a beautiful lesson here:

Mary was a sinner, but saved by grace. Of all women of all time, she is outstanding for one reason: as no other woman “*she ... believed*.” Abraham is “the father of the faithful [those who believe],” but even he stumbled and staggered in his up and down learning how to believe. But not this woman. From the moment the angel made the stunning announcement, she said with immediate alacrity, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38). The prenatal “faith” care she gave her Son was like that of no other mother in history. *But the uniqueness was environmental, not genetic.* And the uniqueness did not “exempt” Him from having to meet

the most awful temptations any sinful human being can experience.

Reports in the press indicate that Pope John Paul II would like to declare as a new dogma a widespread belief in the Roman Catholic Church—that Mary is the Co-Redemptrix of humanity and Mediatrix of all graces. *U. S. News and World Report* says “that would make her a participant in salvation” (June 16, 1997). Again, a papal error counterfeits a precious truth: Mary took good care of Baby Jesus. She shielded her holy fetus from involvement in drugs, alcohol, or other poisons. This in no way contributed to His righteousness, but it gave Him a healthy human body in which to suffer for us, live for us, and die for us.

It will make you happy if some day the Lord can say of *you*, “Blessed is he/she who believed”!

## CONCLUSION

**Christ has saved us!** This is the best Good News you'll ever hear. Christ's taking a sinful nature is not equivalent to participation in sin. Sin has to do with the will, a volitional exercise, however unconscious or embryonic it may be. And Christ refused "decidedly" to sin in any form, in feeling, in thought, in purpose, in imagination, in fantasy, in word, in deed.

His mother was not a sinless woman, for she confessed that she was a sinner in need of a Saviour (Luke 1:47). The Immaculate Conception theory is not biblical. But Mary was unusual in one respect: *she had unusual faith to believe*. That's why "all generations" call her "blessed."

Christ's being conceived of the Holy Spirit did not lessen His complete identity with us through His sinful mother, or ameliorate the power of the temptations to sin that we know; but it did provide Him with a power greater than any *unconverted* human being has to resist the impulse or temptation to sin that has swept us all into its power. And we can have that same power by faith.

It was demonstrated in Christ's complete victory over sin in His flesh which was identical to ours, for "He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in His flesh the enmity." "You that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable in His sight" (Eph. 2:14, 15; Col. 1:22).

While Christ grew to what we call the age of accountability, He laid aside all divine prerogatives and fought the battle as we must fight it – by faith alone. He grew into a perfect identity with the human family until it could be said that God “hath made Him to be sin who knew no sin.” Stronger and fiercer became the temptations that assailed Him; and He met them in increasing agony of conflict. Thus His righteousness was not static or “natural,” innate, or “exempt” from our struggle. It was dynamic, the result of conflict with the enemy more terrible than imaginable.

The fact that this victory began in His infancy, yes, even in His prenatal state, is not to be wondered at. Before He knew “to refuse the evil, and choose the good,” the Virgin’s Son in some way “condemned sin in the flesh,” for He was “Immanuel, which is being interpreted, God with us” (Isa. 7:14-16; Rom. 8:3). If He were in any way excused from that infantile confrontation with the temptation to sin, He could not be our Saviour, for He could not then be our perfect Substitute or Example. “Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder.”

Was it on an Infant’s shoulder that the “government” lay? Yes; the government of earth and heaven lay on a Baby’s “shoulder,” and had He sinned even once as an infant through a temper tantrum or a selfish manifestation of disposition, the “government” would have crashed, and the plan of redemption would have failed. Even as “a child” “His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6). We tread softly here on holy ground.

But never could it be said that “the government shall be upon His shoulder” had He been exempt or excused from the problem that “the government” faced – the problem of sin taking residence in fallen, sinful human flesh. The Child was “born unto us” especially that He might solve the problem of sin and

redeem us from the penalty and power of sin. For this reason He was sent “in the likeness of sinful flesh,” yes, even from the moment of His conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

Our problem is not our babyhood. For all of us who read this, those days are gone forever. The great issue now to be settled is not how we can relive our prenatal or babyhood days, or change our heredity. No need to cry about the past. To blame others or ourselves for our past is futile. Christ is a Saviour who meets us where we are at this moment, and saves to the uttermost.

What will we do from now on with “so great salvation”? For all of us, this is Good News not to be trifled with.

## **DID CHRIST RESIST (AND CONQUER) INWARD TEMPTATIONS TO SIN?**

*QUESTION: Is there evidence that Christ had to meet temptations arising from within? To fight against the “liability” or “tendency” to sin? Does Ellen White say that He had to resist the downward pull of an evil tendency? Or was the “inclination “ which He “was put to the closest test ...to resist” a sinless option, and therefore not a real temptation to sin (cf. 7BC 930)? What does the context indicate?*

Let us take the last question first. The following includes the general context of that statement:

It was as difficult for Him [Christ] to keep the level of humanity as for men to rise above the low level of their depraved natures, and be partakers of the divine nature.

Christ was put to the closest test, requiring the strength of all His faculties to resist the inclination when in danger, to use His power to deliver Himself from peril, and triumph over the power of the prince of darkness. Satan showed his knowledge of the weak points of the human heart, and put forth his utmost power to take advantage of the weakness of the humanity which Christ had assumed in order to overcome His temptations on man’s account (7BC 930; from RH, April 1, 1875).

It seems fair to see the following in this passage:

- (1) The necessity for Christ to “resist the inclination”

was “the closest test,” and therefore definitely a “temptation.” (“Test” and “temptation” are synonyms). Such a test or temptation implies a potential for sin.

(2) This “inclination” was relevant to “the weak points of the human heart,” and therefore cannot be equated merely with physical weakness or weariness. While the next clause speaks of “the weakness of the humanity which Christ had assumed” and could be interpreted as mere physical weakness, such an interpretation violates the context, for whatever “weakness” Ellen White refers to is definitely related to Satan’s “temptations on man’s account,” and concerns “weak points of the human heart,” not merely weakness of the human body.

(3) A “test” or “temptation” in this context could not involve merely a sinless option, for that would be an anomaly, virtually a self-contradiction. For Christ to sweat drops of blood in resisting a sinless option would be incomprehensible, and would contradict the inspired insight into His struggle: “Consider Him. ... Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against *sin*” (Heb. 12:2-4). “Christ ... died *unto sin*,” not unto mere physical infirmity (Rom. 6:10).

(4) If Christ had yielded to this “inclination,” would the yielding have been sin? Many seem to think that if He had wiped the bloody sweat from His brow, refused the cross, and returned unscratched to the throne of His Father after rejecting the sacrifice involved and thus denied His Father’s will, it would have been for Him merely a sinless option. All would still have been well. Refusing to save the world at the cost of Himself would not have been sin for Him.

But this cannot be true. The problem He faced was “danger” or “peril.” The “inclination” He wrestled with was an appeal to self to escape it. If He had yielded to this “inclination,” He would have refused the cross, what Satan wanted Him to do, exactly. We need only ask, Could Satan’s will for Him ever be a sinless will?

If Christ had refused His cross, would it have been actual sin for Him? If in Gethsemane He had not “resisted unto blood, striving *against sin*,” Ellen White indicates that it would have been sin for Christ to reject the cross:

Could one sin have been found in Christ, had He in one particular yielded to Satan to escape the terrible torture, the enemy of God and man would have triumphed (DA 761).

In other words, to “yield to Satan to escape the terrible torture” would have been “one sin ... found in Christ.” He claimed to be sinless because “I do always those things that please” “the Father” (John 8:46, 29). “Christ pleased not Himself” (Rom. 15:3). It was in denying His own will and seeking instead His Father’s will that He “overcame” (cf. John 5:30; Rev. 3:21). Therefore, had He refused the cross He could not have said, “I have kept my Father’s commandments.”

His going to the cross was (we speak reverently, in His own words) “not as I will, but as Thou wilt” (cf. John 15:10; Matt. 26:39). If “love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom. 13:10), a cross-less Christ would have transgressed the law, for refusing the cross would not have been love (*agape*). “Had He failed in His test and trial, He would have been disobedient to the voice of God, and the world would have been lost” (5BC 1083). This complete “test and trial” of necessity included His cross. Disobedience to the will of God is what sin is all about.

(5) We have to agree that the “inclination” Christ wrestled with was terribly strong, for it required “the strength of all His faculties to resist” it. If yielding would have been sin for Him, this was an inward “inclination” to sin which He perfectly (though painfully) resisted. He was “in an agony ... and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground” (Luke 22:44).



Yes, His temptations were infinitely greater than any of ours; but that does not mean they were unrelated to ours. As we know the inward hunger for sinful indulgence, the terrible compulsion of illicit love or desire or addiction, so Christ knew the inward yearning of soul for release from His cross. All our inward “inclinations” to sin are a similar compulsion to evade the cross on which self is to be crucified with Him! It is sin which made the cross necessary, and for either Christ (or us) to evade it is sin.

Coming now to the other related question: We must note what Jesus Himself said which seems to have been mysteriously neglected for centuries. Yet it is the clearest and most authoritative statement ever given us on the subject of the human nature which Christ “took” or “assumed” in His incarnation. These are His own words:

I can of Mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and My judgment is just; because I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me (John 5:30).

I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me (John 6:38).

O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt (Matt. 26:39).

Thus Christ subjected Himself to the *inner* conflict that we all have. He took a will which had to be denied. (Such a “will” is subservient to an inner choice.) This is not to impute sin to Christ. The veil which has hidden this Christological statement from theologians for centuries may be Augustinian “original sin,” which most entertain. Without clearly thinking through

the problem, they assume that human nature which includes a will naturally opposed to God's will is automatic participation in sin. But they don't understand "the third angel's message in verity." Temptability is not sin, nor even wrestling with the allurements of sinful or selfish desire; sin is *yielding* to the temptation or desire in opposition to the will of God.

Our sinful nature is not merely the inherited consequences of six thousand years of sin; it is the inward inclination to the love of self which *if indulged* is "enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7). But Christ never indulged.

"Mine own will" resisted, rejected, overcome, "condemned ... in the flesh," would not be sin for Christ. Likewise for us, inward "inclination" to sin perfectly resisted through the grace of Christ is not sin. (Apart from faith in Him, that's of course impossible for fallen man.)

Because the popular idea is that an inward inclination is already sin, many reason themselves into tragedy:

Since the temptation to fornication or adultery has already made its appeal, therefore they think the temptation is already sin. Then they conclude they might just as well fulfill the desire and yield to the deed, since they think full obedience to God's law is impossible anyway. If you must seek pardon for one sin, why not seek it for two? Thus they fall into a deadly trap.

In other words, if feeling the inward allurements of temptation is already sin which requires Someone vicariously to keep the law in your place (excusing you), you might just as well let Him go a step further and "cover" your actual illicit sexual act. Is it any more bother for Him to "cover" a sinful deed than to "cover" a sinful thought? This is the logic that excuses a vast amount of immorality, even some within the precincts of the "remnant church." It's raw antinomianism masquerading as "the gospel."

Like Bunyan's Pilgrim walking through the Valley of the Shadow, we sometimes cannot distinguish between the whis-

pered suggestions of the enemy perched on our shoulder (whispers that are not sin) and our own personal mental involvement with sin through participation or fantasizing. Luther wisely said we can't keep the birds from flying over our heads, but we can stop them from making a nest in our hair. It is vain to argue whether it takes one second or a thousandth of a second for Satan's whispered evil thought to become our participation; what's important is that through faith in Christ it is possible "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:3, 4). We serve a Saviour who *saves*.

"But," says someone, "denying His own will was easy for Him but hard for me!" In reply, look at the agonies of Gethsemane and the cross. Here is where He was put to "the closest test, requiring the strength of all His faculties" to resist. To recognize that Gethsemane and Calvary were "the closest test" is not to deny that His whole life was an unending "test." Identify with Him and you die to sin in Him.

Lastly, Ellen White herself fully supports our Lord's statement about the reality of His inner struggle with His "own will" and "inclination." In 1894 she published her little tract which demonstrated her support for the 1888 idea of the nature of Christ entitled, *Christ Tempted As We Are*. Strangely, it has remained officially out of print throughout this century. On page 11 she says: "The Christian is to realize that ... his strongest temptations will come from within; for he must battle against the inclinations of the natural heart. The Lord knows our weaknesses. ... If we could comprehend what Christ is to us. ... !"

If our "strongest temptations will come from within," then it follows that Christ also battled with "temptations ... from within." It is an axiom that things the same are equal to each other.

Never did He cherish, entertain, or harbor an evil thought or purpose. And having done so, He hated iniquity," or "recoiled from evil."

So, by His grace, may we, through His imputed and imparted righteousness. "We need not retain one sinful propensity."

## For Further Study

If this essay has stimulated your interest, you may enjoy these books:

- *The Glad Tidings*, by E. J. Waggoner. Galatians verse-by-verse. 144 pp.
- *The Consecrated Way to Christian Perfection*, by A. T. Jones. Presents Christ our Saviour as prophet, priest, and king. 92 pp.
- *Christ and His Righteousness*, by E. J. Waggoner. A clear study on the nature of Christ, closest to the 1888 presentation. 96 pp.
- *“The Golden Chain,” “Is There a Broken Link?”*, by Robert J. Wieland. Insights into the nature of Christ. Question-and-answer format. 93 pp. Also available as an AudioBook, read by the author.
- *“Made Like ... His Brethren,”* by Donald K. Short. Could the delay in the second advent be the result of not understanding the incarnation? This work probes Christ’s sojourn in human nature. 163 pp.
- *The 1888 Message—An Introduction*, by Robert J. Wieland. The basic concepts and historical background of the 1888 message. Originally published by Review and Herald, revised 1997. 185 pp.
- *Grace on Trial*, by Robert J. Wieland. The heart-warming message of 1888 and its power to change lives. 136 pp.
- *“Lightened With His Glory,”* by Robert J. Wieland. Answers serious questions about the 1888 message. Question-and-answer format. 182 pp.

- *In Search of the Cross*, by Robert J. Wieland. A revelation of the gospel that touches hearts with a genuine appreciation of what Christ did for us on the cross. 120 pp.

- *Gold Tried in the Fire*, by Robert J. Wieland. For all who want to better understand the “faith of Jesus” and the nature of Christ. 95 pp.

- *The Good News Is Better Than You Think*, by Robert J. Wieland. Presents the gospel as news so good it’s hard to believe. Excellent witnessing tool. 95 pp.

- *Powerful Good News*, by Robert J. Wieland. Evangelistic book for non-SDA readers. 143 pp. Also available as an AudioBook, read by the author.

Want to win souls by using the 1888 message concepts?

*The Glad Tidings Bible Study Guides* embody the Good News of the nearness of the Saviour. *Set of 34 lessons in envelope.*