

## The Divine Christ

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In our rush to embrace our loving Lord who took humanity that we might be saved, sometimes we forget who he truly is. We are so overwhelmed by Jesus' self-identification with us: Son of Man, seed of Abraham; that we miss his "otherness," his divinity—for indeed he truly has ever been God. While Jesus as Son of Man means so much to us in his coming to share with us fallen human beings—man among men, human brother and friend—we must not lose sight of Jesus, Son of God.

*Jesus is not the same as us.* That seems such an obvious statement, yet many appear to have a mental block at this point, since they so want Jesus to be our exact example, the prototype to follow, proving that "we can do it!" Even if the qualifier "in Christ's strength" is added, it seems that by minutely following the legal recipe then we can be the same as Christ in achieving a sinless life. Eventually this leads to total discouragement and despair as the command "Be ye perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect" is misconstrued and misapplied, and it is clearly apparent to all but the blindest perfectionist that sin continues in all Christian lives. So either you become spiritually myopic and fail to see your imperfections (and consequently mistakenly believe you do not sin), or you become convinced that your sinful nature is beyond redemption because however hard you try (saying "Not I, but Christ" to be sure) you never approach the kind of life Christ led.

So then, though we may rightly wish to identify with Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, we must be very careful in what way we think of him as being like ourselves. How was he human? "Let every human being be warned from the ground of making Christ altogether human, such an one as ourselves; for it cannot be."<sup>1</sup> *It cannot be*, and can never be that Jesus came exactly as one of us.

"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps. 51:5), a clear description of the human condition. As we look back in our lives there never has been a time when we were without sin. We were *born in sin*. We know that to be true; it is a universal human experience. "There is none righteous, no, not one"; "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God"; "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves" (Romans 3: 10; Romans 3:23; 1 John 1: 10).

Why? Because of Adam. "Because of sin, his (Adam's) posterity was born with inherent propensities of disobedience"; from the Fall "children inherit natures with propensities to evil."<sup>2</sup> We tend towards sin. We are "bent" that way. Our "natural" desire is towards the sinful. As we all know, "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:19)

So then, if "the wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies," (Ps. 58:3), is this the same for the humanity Christ took upon himself? Was he too "shapen in iniquity"? When Adam and Eve distrusted God and failed to believe he was right, their natures became "depraved by sin."<sup>3</sup> Is this the nature Jesus took?

No. He "knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21); he was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners" (Heb. 7:26). "In Him is no sin" (1 Jn. 3:5); he was "the holy One of God" (Mk. 1:24). In concentrating on the human nature of Christ there can be great danger. "Be careful, exceedingly

careful as to how you dwell on the human nature of Christ. Do not set Him before the people as a man with the propensities of sin. He is the second Adam.”<sup>4</sup> “Christ is called the second Adam. In purity and holiness, connected with God and beloved by God, He began where the first Adam began.”<sup>5</sup>

Note the stress here on “the second Adam”, referring to 1 Cor. 15:22—in the first Adam we all die, but in Christ, the second Adam, we shall all be made alive. Jesus begins where the first Adam began—sinless. Without a desire to sin. With a nature that is not *predisposed* to sin (this is the meaning of “propensities” to sin noted above—the “predisposition” or “bent” towards evil).

The nature Christ took as he assumed human form was the same nature as Adam before he sinned. “He (Christ) vanquished Satan in *the same nature* over which in Eden Satan obtained the victory.”<sup>6</sup> Adam did not have a nature with tendencies to sin before he fell. No more did Christ have such sin tendencies. He certainly took on humanity with all its weaknesses (Mt. 8:17), but not our sinfulness with which we are born. “He is a brother in our infirmities, but *not in possessing like passions*. As the sinless One, *His nature recoiled from evil*.” He was unlike us in “not possessing the passions of our human, fallen natures.”<sup>7</sup>

Jesus was simply not inclined to sin. He had no such tendencies, no such propensities. He had the same “liabilities” that we have in terms of weaknesses and infirmities,<sup>8</sup> but not our *sinful* nature. “Never, in any way, leave the slightest impression upon human minds that a taint of, *or inclination to*, corruption rested upon Christ...”<sup>9</sup> So while he was indeed “tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15), and his temptations were that much greater because of his divine power and abilities, and while these temptations were very real and *Jesus could have sinned*, he did not have our *inclination* to sin.

So then, “we should have no misgivings in regard to the perfect sinlessness of the human nature of Christ”<sup>10</sup> He was born with it, and he never in any way lost it. Jesus “was born without a taint of sin,”<sup>11</sup> something we can never claim, and he took “the nature but not the sinfulness of man”<sup>12</sup>

So did Jesus have an advantage, then? The fact that he is very different to us has led some to conclude that if we credit Jesus with a nature within which there was “not for one moment... an evil propensity,”<sup>13</sup> then somehow Jesus was unfairly better able to meet the devil’s temptations. Not so. Jesus relied on the same power to which we have access, having “emptied himself” of his eternal majesty. But he was not trying to prove that man in his sinful condition could obey God. Quite the reverse: in his fallen, sin-filled nature mankind was incapable of responding rightly to God. “Man had become so degraded by sin that it was impossible for him, in himself, to come into harmony with Him whose nature is purity and goodness.”<sup>14</sup> Jesus trusted God completely where Adam and Eve failed, and so vindicated the trustworthiness of God forever. Only through Jesus then can we too be healed from the damage sin has caused, and be able to trust God completely—for in Jesus we have truly seen God.

And this is the fundamental point. Jesus came to us, identified with us, lived with us, was tempted like us—but he was not us. “He did not cease to be God when He became man.”<sup>15</sup> Jesus was and is God. His title in Isaiah 9:6 is Everlasting Father. He was not simply a “perfect man” demonstrating how God’s law could be kept, he was not just our human example—he was God! Because we so badly want him to be human must never blind us to his divinity that though veiled he retained throughout his earthly life. “God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16), and because we can better understand his humanity can never be an excuse for omitting his divinity.

Just before his clearest demonstration of his love for us, God’s love for us, Jesus said

“The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me” (Jn. 14:30). At no time in his life did Jesus compromise his unfallen nature—for he never fell into temptation. There was nothing “for” the devil in the divine Christ, there was no point of contact whatsoever: Jesus was totally alien to sin. And we must make sure we do not suggest that Jesus in his humanity ever took on the nature of sin with which we are born.

The greatest Christian heresy is to deny, in whatever way, the full and complete divinity of Christ. And as the conflict deepens between the forces of good and evil, the subtle suggestion that Jesus was *like* us, and that we can emulate him in our sinful fallen nature, will deceive many. The warning is given:

“I perceive that there is danger in approaching subjects which dwell on the humanity of the Son of the infinite God...”<sup>16</sup>

The great danger is in stressing the humanity of Jesus as a direct parallel of ours, that we can work our own salvation—even if we hedge with statements about “only through Christ”—and fall into a dread religion of unquestioning frightened obedience. The “law model” cannot save us, however we interpret it. The Stoic way of beating ourselves into cathartic submission is not the gospel but legalism, as dry as the hills of Gilboa that have neither dew nor rain. And attempting to do all the fighting against temptation, the putting to death of the old man, the submission of self, will never work. It is the transforming grace of God that we need, for Jesus has won the battle already—we don’t have to fight old wars! In our fallen humanity, there is no hope. But with Jesus, in his unconquered, undefeated divine-human nature, there is victory!

Avoiding over-emphasizing the humanity of Jesus, let’s remember who he has always been: God himself. He was God with the Father in the very beginning, “He did not cease to be God when He became man” and he will always be God. And remember, it was only because he was God that he can save: for no created being can save another. Recognizing the divine Christ means moving away from stress on the human Jesus and “example theology,” away from works righteousness and perfectionism to the Son, to the Son of God who sets you free, for whoever who has the Son is free indeed. Free to choose the right because it *is* right, not because someone says so, or orders you, or threatens you.

Sin and death came into the world through one man, Adam (Rom. 5:12), and because of his fallen nature that we all have, we shall all die. And yet because of Christ’s sinless nature, all who wish to will be made alive (1 Cor. 15:22).

Truth and error often lie side by side. It is so easy to become confused. Yet the warning is there, and the danger spelled out. Perhaps the best test is that of the fruits. Struggling to emulate Christ means repeated failure, with the accompanying discouragement and depression. For if your religion is harsh and foreboding; or if you have no assurance of salvation—then you need to look again. The great deception, the omega of heresy, is that Jesus wasn’t *quite* God, that his victory was not *quite* enough, that you must work to *save yourself*.

The great truth is that we already *have* an eternal saving relationship with God now. We place our complete trust in him, and he saves us by changing us: “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory.” (2 Cor. 3:18.) It is the divine Christ who has revealed to us the truth about our trustworthy God, and who has won us back to love and faith in him. His transforming grace is the assurance of our future—home with our gracious God for all eternity. This is the essential truth of the God who came to us, like us, to be with us so that we might live forever with him. *What an amazing God!*

References: All from Ellen White.

1. 5 SDABC, 1129
2. 3SDABC, 755.
3. PP61.
4. 5SDABC, 1128.
5. Questions on Doctrine, 650.
6. Ibid., 651. Emphasis supplied.
7. 2T202,509. Emphasis supplied.
8. 1SM 226, DA 49. Emphasis supplied.
9. 5 SDABC 1128. Emphasis supplied.
10. 5 SDABC, 1131.
11. 7 SDABC, 925.
12. Ibid., 912.
13. 5SDABC, 1128.
14. PP64.
15. 5SDABC, 1129. Note also E.J. Waggoner, Christ and His Righteousness. 212:  
“He (Christ) did not change His nature in coming to this earth, but only His form.”
16. 5SDABC, 1129.