

DOCTRINE OF CHRIST

The Impeccability and Sinlessness of Christ

Lesson # 8

Do you know what “impeccability” means? Do you know why it was absolutely necessary that Christ be impeccable? Did Jesus sin? Why not? Could Jesus sin? If Jesus couldn’t sin, then how could He be tempted? All of these questions relate to the doctrines of impeccability and sinlessness of Christ. In this study we will study the doctrines of Christ’s impeccability and sinlessness and discover why these doctrines are important and how they apply to the lives of believers today.

I. DEFINITIONS OF IMPECCABILITY AND SINLESSNESS

- A. Webster defines impeccable as *“not capable of sinning or liable to sin, free from fault or blame, flawless.”*¹
- B. *“We ascribe to Christ not only natural, but also moral, integrity or moral perfection, that is sinlessness. 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.”*²
- C. *“[Christ existed in] a state of sinlessness and impeccability, because the incarnation did not change the nature and character of the Son. That his whole life was sinless is several times asserted (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:22; Heb. 4:15; Mt. 3:14-17; Jn. 8:46; 1 Jn. 2:1f.) That he was exempt from the entail of original sin in Adam is evident from the fact that he was not bound to die for sins of his own (Heb. 7:26), and hence could die vicariously and representatively, the righteous taking the place of the unrighteous (2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 5:16ff; Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 3:18). That he was impeccable, and could not sin, follows from the fact that he remained God the Son (Jn. 5:19, 30). Deviation from the Father’s will was no more possible for him in the incarnate state than before. His deity was the guarantee that he would achieve in the flesh that sinlessness which was prerequisite if he were to die as ‘a lamb without blemish or spot’ (1 Pet. 1:19).”*³
- D. *“The point of view that Christ could sin is designated by the term “peccability,” and the doctrine that Christ could not sin is referred to as the impeccability of Christ. Adherents of both views agree that Christ did not sin, but those who affirm peccability hold that He could have sinned, whereas those who declare the impeccability of Christ believe that He could not sin due to the presence of the divine nature.”*⁴

¹Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary, pg. 569.

²Luis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pg. 318.

³*New Bible Dictionary*, Logos Bible Software.

⁴John Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, pg. 145.

- E. It must be understood that the doctrine of impeccability and the doctrine of sinlessness, though closely related, are two separate doctrines. Impeccability is the doctrine that says it was impossible for Jesus to sin. The doctrine of Jesus' sinlessness addresses the fact that Jesus had no sin. The former addresses the reason why Jesus had no sin and the latter, the fact that He was sinless.

II. THOUGHTS TO PONDER ABOUT IMPECCABILITY

- A. *"A question has been raised . . . whether the sinlessness of Christ was the same as that of Adam before the fall or whether it possessed a peculiar character because of the presence of the divine nature. In a word, could the son of God be tempted as Adam was tempted and could He have sinned as Adam sinned? While most orthodox theologians agree that Christ could be tempted because of the presence of a human nature, a division occurs on the question as to whether being tempted He could sin."⁵*
- B. *"Jesus' humanity was sinless, and the circumstances of his birth call attention to the miracle that was involved when Mary, a sinner (Luke 1:47), gave birth to one who was not ?in Adam? as she was, nor therefore needed a Savior as she did. Rather, Jesus was destined through the maintained sinlessness of his unflawed human nature to become the perfect sacrifice for human sins, and so the Savior of his mother and of the rest of the church with her."⁶*
- C. *"(1) Scripture clearly affirms that Christ never actually sinned. . . There should be no question in our minds at all on this fact. (2) It also clearly affirms that Jesus was tempted, and that these were real temptations (Luke 4:2). If we believe Scripture, then we must insist that Christ "in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). If our speculation on the question of whether Christ could have sinned ever leads us to say that he was not truly tempted, then we have reached a wrong conclusion, one that contradicts the clear statements of Scripture."⁷*
- D. The often asked question is whether or not Jesus could have sinned? Some might point out that the Scripture tells us that God does no evil and cannot be tempted (**Jam. 1:13**). Jesus was God, but Jesus was also tempted. How can this be? How was it possible for Jesus to be tempted and if He was tempted was it possible for Jesus to sin? If not, how could Jesus' temptation be genuine? How can Jesus relate to us and our temptations if it was not possible for Jesus to sin?

⁵John Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, pg. 147.

⁶J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology : A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1995, c1993).

⁷Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, pg. 538.

III. ILLUSTRATIONS OF IMPECCABILITY

- A. *“The question is, then, can such a person as Christ is, possessing both human and divine natures, be tempted if he is impeccable? The answer must be in the affirmative. The question is simply is it possible to attempt the impossible? To this all would agree. It is possible for a rowboat to attack a battleship, even though it is conceivably impossible for the rowboat to conquer the battleship.”⁸*
- B. *“It is objected to the doctrine of Christ’s impeccability that it is inconsistent with his temptability. A person who cannot sin, it is said, cannot be tempted to sin. This is not correct; any more than it would be correct to say that because an army cannot be conquered, it cannot be attacked.”⁹*
- C. *“Some may wonder how Jesus can completely identify with us if He did not actually sin as we do. It was Jesus’ facing sin with His perfect righteousness and truth, however, that qualifies him. Merely experiencing something does not give us understanding of it. A person can have many successful operations without understanding the least bit about surgery. On the other hand, a doctor may perform thousands of complicated and successful operations without ever having had the surgery himself. It is his knowledge of the disease or disorder and his surgical skill in treating it that qualifies him, not his having had the disease. He has great experience with the disease—much greater experience with it than any of his patients—having confronted it in all of its manifestations. Jesus never sinned, but He understands sin better than any man. He has seen it more clearly and fought it more diligently than any of us could ever be able to do.”¹⁰*
- D. *“Many theologians have pointed out that only he who successfully resists a temptation to the end most fully feels the force of that temptation. Just as a champion weightlifter who successfully lifts and holds over head the heaviest weight in the contest feels the force of it more fully than one who attempts to lift it and drops it, so any Christian who has successfully faced a temptation to the end knows that that is far more difficult than giving into it at once. So it was with Jesus: every temptation he faced, he faced to the end, and triumphed over it. The temptations were real, even though he did not give in to them. In fact, they were most real because he did not give into them.”¹¹*

⁸ John Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, pg. 145.

⁹ William Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 2, pg. 336.

¹⁰ John MacArthur, *Hebrews*, pg. 98.

¹¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, pg. 539.

IV. SCRIPTURAL PROOF OF THE IMPECCABILITY AND SINLESSNESS OF CHRIST

- A. **Isa. 53:9-12** His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth. 10 But the Lord was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand. 11 As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.
- B. **Mt. 27:4, 19** [Judas speaking] “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” But they said, “What is that to us? See to that yourself!” . . . 19 While he [Pilate] was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent him a message, saying, “Have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him.”
- C. **Lk. 23:41** [thief on the cross] “And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.”
- D. **Jn. 6:69** “We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.”
- E. **Jn. 8:46 & 48** “Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? . . . 48 The Jews answered and said to Him, “Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?”
- F. **Jn. 14:30** “I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me.”
- G. **II Cor. 5:21** He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.
- H. **Heb. 4:15** For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.
- I. **Heb. 7:26-28** For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. 28 For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.

- J. **Heb. 9:14** how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?
- K. **Heb. 13:8** Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.
- L. **I Pet. 1:18-19** knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19 but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.
- M. **I Pet. 2:22-24** who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; 23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.
- N. **I Pet. 3:18** For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;
- O. **I Jn. 2:1-2** My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.
- P. **I Jn. 3:5** You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin.

V. **ERRORS CONCERNING THE IMPECCABILITY OF CHRIST**

- A. If Jesus could be tempted, then He could have sinned.
- B. Jesus had to be able to sin because He had a human nature.
- C. If Jesus could not sin, then Jesus could not be tempted.
- D. Jesus sinned, but far less than most good men.
- E. We know that Jesus was a sinner because the Scriptures say He was made "*in the likeness of sinful flesh*" (**Rom. 8:3**).

Any affirmation of moral failure on the part of Christ requires a doctrine of His person which would deny in some sense His absolute deity. (John Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, pg. 145.)

The idea that temptability implies susceptibility is unsound. While the temptation may be real, there may be infinite power to resist that temptation and if this power is infinite, the person is impeccable. (John Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, pg. 147.)

VI. APPLICATION OF THE IMPECCABILITY OF CHRIST

- A. Christ's sinlessness guarantees your salvation through a perfect atonement.
- B. Christ was tempted to a far greater degree than you. His willingness to do this proves His love for you.
- C. Because Christ was tempted like you are but to a far greater degree, He is therefore able to sympathize with your struggles against sin.
- D. Because Christ was tempted like us, He knows what we need to overcome temptation and has given us all we need to be like Him.
- E. Jesus is the only perfect model we can pattern our lives after since He displayed the most godly lifestyle and was free from sin.
- F. Your humanity is good even though you have a sin nature. It is not human nature that is evil but the consequences and presence of sin.
- G. If our glorification makes us like Christ, then we can look forward to a sinless eternity.
- H. Because every believer is slowly being transformed into the image and likeness of Christ, they should see sin in their life decrease.

“O my soul, stand and admire this blessed doctrine of perfection in Christ Jesus! What though thou shouldst become more pure and pure every day, yet perfection would still be beyond thee. The heights say perfection is not in them; the depths say, “Perfection is not here;” the caverns in the bowels of the earth tell us, “Perfection is not in us.” Perfection is in the person of Jesus Christ alone. O Christian, think of this! The robes of Jesus are put on thee; the royal crown Christ Jesus wore is now, to God’s eyes, on thy head; the robe of azure which once he had upon his shoulders is now on thine; his silver sandal is thine; the golden zone his belt of glory, is thine; the matchless purity of his sinless life is thine; everything that Christ has is thine; thou art perfect in him; there is nothing thou canst want which he cannot give thee!”¹²

¹²Charles H. Spurgeon, “Perfection in Christ,” vol. 44, Spurgeon’s Sermons.