

Impeccableness of Christ

By [Billy C. Sichone](#)

Central Africa Baptist University

Introduction

The person and nature of Christ has been an issue that has generated much debate. Right from the early stages of the Church, religious people have debated and argued over the real nature of Christ. Questions often asked include: Was Christ really divine? Was he created or existed from eternity? If he existed from eternity, in what form was he? The fact that Jesus Christ was incarnated, did he cease to be God or reduced himself to a lesser god? If at all Christ reduced himself to be a lesser deity, did he inherit the sinful nature? Further, was he susceptible to sinning or not? Questions such as these and many others beside, keep raging and it appears will continue for many years to come.

In this paper however, we scratch on the surface of this great subject, specifically the impeccability of Christ.

Jesus Christ: His Nature, Person and Historical Considerations

As already stated, Jesus Christ's nature has been a subject of debate from ancient times. From the early days, Christians worshipped Christ whom they claimed had risen from the dead. Having appeared to his apostles and other witnesses, Jesus is said to have been taken up to heaven from whence he promised to return at an uncertain future date. The early saints bundled together as they eagerly expected the promised *Paraclete* who was poured out on the day of Pentecost. As expected, the disciples were empowered and immediately impacted their context resulting in several thousands being converted.

As the years rolled on and persecution raged hotter, the disciples of Jesus would meet in secret places such as the catacombs to worship Christ as divine. At that early stage, it would appear that not much thought was paid to the actual nature and person of Christ apart from the fact that he was the expected messiah that rose from the dead. In later centuries however, as heresies made their maiden voyage on the theological landscape, questions were raised as to the exact nature and person of Christ, hence the Christological controversies of the third fourth and fifth centuries (Mbewe 1995). The basic issues surrounding the Christological controversies bordered around the actual nature of Christ as highlighted in the introduction above. The fact that Jesus was divine and human

at the same time was relatively solved by the Nicene or Toledo councils but the question that persisted and to some extent still does was whether Jesus relinquished his divinity and thereby became a sinner like the rest of us or what? Further, if Jesus did not inherit the sin nature, then was he fully human or not?

Dr Daniel Briggs of the Aletheia Logos University (ALU) has written some interesting facts around the person and nature of the incarnate Jesus. In that account, Dr Briggs contends that Jesus never ceased to be God when he incarnated and yet at the same time was shielded from the sin nature. He further asserts that Jesus, though born of a woman Mary was not genetically connected to her but was deposited in her womb by the Holy Spirit and thus avoided the sin nature. Additionally, Dr Briggs suggests that Jesus was without sin and yet was fully a human being. At a glance one would be tempted to think Briggs teaches that Jesus could have sinned but once read in context, the correct picture emerges. We quote him at length in his own words as follows: "Now, if sinless Adam, the "son of God", can be tempted by Satan, to which he succumbed and plunged the world into sin, then certainly the second Adam (Yahushua) could also be tempted. Yet, Yahushua prevailed and did not succumb to Satan's temptations (Hebrews 4:15) but was obedient to the will of YHWH (Hebrews 10:7), even unto the torturous end (Luke 22:42), even the death on the cross." (Volume 2 pp 42) In many senses, Dr Briggs treads on very delicate ground daring Docetism in the face and yet not falling into the heresy. From Dr Briggs' and other notable writers, we can safely conclude that Jesus was fully a human being though without sin and for him to qualify to be the saviour of the world, he had to be thus.

Impeccability defined

The word "*Impeccability*" has been and can be defined differently by different people. For our purposes, we offer a basic working definition. By the impeccability of Christ, what exactly is meant? Simply stated, *the impeccability of Christ has reference to the fact that Jesus was never tempted to the point where he contemplated yielding to sin or sinning at all.* This means that although Christ was exposed to sin, he had no capacity let alone propensity to sin, being divine. Had he sinned, the world would never have been saved.

Could Jesus have possibly sinned? Did he have the capacity to sin?

But the question arises, was *Yahushua* susceptible to sin? Could he be tempted into sinning? What would we say about His Gethsemane plea to the Father to let the cup pass him by if it were possible? From his expression, it would appear that he dreaded drinking in the dregs of the full cup of the wrath of God, meaning that he was tempted to abort the mission! Not so, a careful reading of the Scriptures will reveal that *Yahushua* knew why he came to the world, to save his people

given to him by the father in eternity past. As such, he was committed to that cause and ended up dying for that cause, hence his victorious cry that it was finished in John 18. That cry was not a cry of despair, far from it but a cry of triumph! He had finished the work of redemption and thus could freely give up his Ghost of his own volition. We may further add that although Jesus was fully human, he exhibited traits true of any human such as emotion, fatigue, rest, sleep, anger (holy!), bleeding etc. that any normal human being can and does experience. That said, was Jesus able to succumb or yield to temptation?

Views on the Nature and Person of Christ in relation to Impeccability

Various positions have been suggested by many well meaning theologians suggesting any of the ensuing points of view:

* Since Jesus was fully human, he could have yielded to temptation and thus sin but he chose not to. That is in sync with scripture that states that he (Jesus) was tempted in every way and yet was without sin. It also agrees/links well with the covenant of works in the Garden that suggests that Adam was equally tempted and failed but the last Adam chose to pass the test and so he did. This view further posits that Jesus could have not only yielded to temptation but actually sinned.

* The other position posits that Jesus was fully man as mentioned above but was divine as well. Being divine with a mission to save his people, he could have not possibly sinned because it was against his nature that could have jeopardised his mission. Christ could not be tempted nor could he have sinned because he did not have the capacity or possibility of sinning if at all he was to be a perfect Lamb of God. This position has been held by many sound theologians that assert the humanity as well as the divinity of *Mashiyach*.

* The third position has asserted that Christ was either divine or merely man and not both. This view posits that Jesus could not possibly have been God because God cannot become a human or vice versa. What was visible appeared to be human when in fact was a phantom and thus escaped the sin nature. Docetists hold this view, which the Apostle John battles with in His first epistle. The apostle asserts in no uncertain terms that Jesus was fully human contrary to the early gnostic tenets that were extant in his day.

Having highlighted the views above, we may safely say that Jesus was the anointed one that was incarnated, conceived of the Holy Spirit, walked amongst us as a sinless being, satisfied the just demands of God and procured salvation for the world. Jesus actually died to atone for the sins of the world, rose from the dead, ascended to Heaven and is seated at the right-hand of the father where he

ever lives to intercede for believers, still having that same transformed body he wore on the earth (Hebrews 7:25).

What Others have Said/Written about the Impeccability of Christ

Many have ventured to say or write something for or against the impeccability of Christ. They either state that Jesus could have yielded to temptation whilst in the desert and sinned or could not possibly sin. Others claim that Jesus was a mere phantom and not a full human being. W.E Best, Arthur W. Pink and others assert that Jesus could not have been tempted or sinned because it would have been inconsistent with his nature. They further state that Jesus was divine and knew the limitations of Satan, his schemes or what he was up to. For instance, Pink says the following in one of his numerous writings:

Christ was not only able to overcome temptation, but He was unable to be overcome by it. Necessarily so, for He was 'the Almighty' (Rev. 1:8). True, Christ was man, but He was the God-man, and as such, absolute Master and Lord of all things. Being Master of all things—as His dominion over the winds and waves, diseases and death, clearly demonstrated—it was impossible that anything should master Him.

Arthur Pink, Murrell and others state that Christ, despite being exposed to sin and sinners could not for moment yield or turn to sin. For instance, Murrell says the following words (on page 152) of his *A Foundation for Faith* volume, in both describing what impeccability implies and how it related to Christ. His words are well set. Here goes:

Christ's Sinlessness (Impeccability) Sinlessness means without sin. Impeccability means not conquerable by sin. Christ is universally believed to be sinless, not all are agreed as to His impeccability. Some say that temptation implies there may be a high degree of temptation where there is no possibility of its succeeding. But it is answered that there may be a high degree of temptation where there is no possibility of its succeeding. Impeccability means not that temptation could not appeal to Christ, but that it could not conquer Him. This was due to the support of His Divine nature, as the Divine nature would be involved in culpability if the person yielded to sin. No temptation to Christ arose out of a sinful nature as is true of man; but the solicitation addressed to his holy nature may have been quite as powerful. When Hebrews 4:15 teaches that Christ was, "tempted in all points like as we are yet without sin," the meaning is that He was tempted as we are except by those desires that arise from inward evil.

The Docetists on the other hand claim that the Jesus that was visible was a mere phantom and not real. Still others claim that *Yahushua* never existed at all!

Thanks to Josephus of old, we have an authentic record of his actual existence, death and purported resurrection (Whiston 1998).

Lessons Gleaned from this Consideration

Reading through and analysing scripture as well as other writings, we come away with the following lessons in point form:

- * The incarnated Jesus was fully human.
- * Jesus was fully divine.
- * Jesus never relinquished his divinity when he was incarnated
- * In the incarnation, Christ was shielded from the sin nature as he was conceived of the Holy Spirit.
- * Although Jesus was fully divine, he had a human nature that was subjected to temptations common to man and yet never sinned.
- * Christ could not possibly have sinned because he was divine and knew what Satan was up to.
- * The temptations in the desert or the possibility of avoiding taking in the dregs at the cross were real but Jesus was committed and determined to fulfil what he came for. His mission could not have been derailed at all.
- * Docetism and some other spurious views are to be avoided and treated as deadly heresy. They are a deadly spiritual plague.
- * The Nestorian and docetic heresies in addition to Sabbellianism have been with the Church for many centuries. Christians need to stand firm on the truth of God.
- * Christ could not sin because he was omnipotent, immutable and omniscient at the same time. Were he otherwise, he probably could have been capable to sin.

Value of this Consideration

A knowledge of the nature and person of Christ not only changes perspectives but affects ones view of sin and holiness. Jesus had to be man to be our saviour and yet at the same time had to be divine. Jesus is the God-man, our Lord and saviour. Few Christians in contemporary times contemplate, albeit, even

marginally, over this grand and pivotal matter. The fact that Christ faced and overcame sin is instructive. It is even more fascinating that he was not only sinlessly perfect but invincible, despite the encounter with sin or its subtle alluring effects. He simply could not sin. It is a deep mysterious shaft where *even Angels fear to tread*, as good old Puritans used to say. For the saint, the knowledge of Christ's hypostatic nature should be a sweet tonic, a comfort for them: Jesus is able to sympathize with our weaknesses because He himself went through all manner of temptation and yet triumphed. This truth should encourage holiness of life too. The Church needs to once again dwell more on this doctrine given the multiple heresies flying around. If our people are not proactively inoculated, we remain susceptible to emerging deleterious heresies. Having recourse to rich, healthy, sound and good resources deepens appreciation of the doctrine. In our research, we found the volume by W.E. Best quite stimulating as it raised and answered pertinent questions. Another, by A.W. Pink was equally a good stimulating read, strongly recommended.

Conclusion

Having assessed the issue before us, we can safely conclude that Jesus was both human and divine-The God-man that traversed the world in time and yet was without sin. He was sinless and thus could not possibly sin or be tempted thereto. Christ was simply incapable of sinning and thus was a perfect lamb and saviour of the world.

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