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## The Impeccability of Jesus Christ

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## THE IMPECCABILITY OF JESUS CHRIST

The doctrine of impeccability (from the Latin, meaning “not able to sin”) deals with the absolute moral purity found within both the character and conduct of Jesus Christ while He was upon this earth.

- The problem of impeccability – There exists no disagreement whatsoever among Bible believers as to whether Christ did sin, but rather whether He could have sinned.

A. Paul Enns observes:

“Those who hold to the peccability of Christ do so on the basis of Hebrews 4:15: *He has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.* If the temptation was genuine then Christ had to be able to sin, otherwise the temptation was not a genuine temptation. Charles Hodge, a Reformed theologian, is perhaps the best representative of this view. He states:

‘If He was a true man He must have been capable of sinning. That He did not sin under the greatest provocation; that when He was reviled He blessed; when He suffered He threatened not; that He was dumb, as a sheep before its shearers, is held up to us as an example. Temptation implies the possibility of sin. If from the constitution of his person it was impossible for Christ to sin, then his temptation was unreal and without effect, and He cannot sympathize with his people.’”  
(*Moody Handbook of Theology*, p. 236)

B. As opposed to Hodge, the great champion for Christ’s impeccability William Shedd writes:

“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.” (*Dogmatic Theology*, vol. II, p. 336)

C. In refuting the doctrine of peccability, Paul Enns concludes:

“The weaknesses of this view are that it does not sufficiently consider Christ in his Person as God as well as man. Additionally, the word temptation (Gk. *peirazo*) is also used of God the Father (Acts 15:10; 1 Cor. 10:9; Heb. 3:9) and the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:9). It is unlikely that anyone would say the Father or the Holy Spirit could have sinned. The conclusion is that temptation does not demand the ability to sin. The people genuinely tempted God the Father and the Holy Spirit, but there was no likelihood of those Persons of the Trinity sinning.”

D. The evidence for the impeccability of Christ is set forth by Shedd and others in the following way:

1. "The immutability of Christ (Heb. 13:8). Christ is unchangeable and therefore could not sin. If Christ could have sinned while on earth, then he could sin now because of his immutability. If he could have sinned on earth, what assurance is there that he will not sin now?"
2. "The omnipotence of Christ (Matt. 28:18). Christ was omnipotent and therefore could not sin. Weakness is implied where sin is possible, yet there was no weakness of any kind in Christ. How could he be omnipotent and still be able to sin?"
3. "The omniscience of Christ (John 2:25). Christ was omniscient and therefore could not sin. Sin depends on ignorance in order that the sinner may be deceived, but Christ could not be deceived because he knows all things, including the hypothetical (Matt. 11:21). If Christ could have sinned then he really did not know what would happen if he would sin.
4. "The deity of Christ. Christ is not only man but also God. If he were only a man then he could have sinned, but God cannot sin and in a union of the two natures, the human nature submits to the divine nature (otherwise the finite is stronger than the infinite). United in the one Person of Christ are the two natures, humanity and deity; because Christ is also deity he could not sin.
5. "The nature of temptation (James 1:14-15). The temptation that came to Christ was from without. However, for sin to take place, there must be an inner response to the outward temptation. Since Jesus did not possess a sin nature, there was nothing within him to respond to the temptation. People sin because there is an inner response to the outer temptation.
6. "The will of Christ. In moral decisions, Christ could have only one will: to do the will of his Father; in moral decisions the human will was subservient to the divine will. If Christ could have sinned then his human will would have been stronger than the divine will.
7. "The authority of Christ (John 10:18). In his deity, Christ had complete authority over his humanity. For example, no one could take the life of Christ except He would lay it down willingly (John 10:18). If Christ had authority over life and death, He certainly had authority over sin; if He could withhold death at will, He could also withhold sin at will." (*Moody Handbook of Theology*, pp. 236-237)

E. The question is asked, however, that, if Christ could not have sinned, then what was the purpose of the temptations in the wilderness? Here it should be observed that these trials were not to see if Christ would sin, but to prove he would not. It is possible for a tiny Chihuahua dog to attack a huge lion, but it is impossible for the little creature to conquer the big cat. A row boat may declare war on a mighty nuclear equipped battleship, but it could never sink it.

- The indications for impeccability

- A. The testimony of Gabriel – *“And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God”* (Luke 1:35).
- B. His own testimony – *“Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?”* (John 8:45). *‘Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me’* (John 14:30). *‘If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love’*” (John 15:10).
- C. The testimony from His enemies
1. Judas – *“Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that”* (Matt. 27:4).
  2. Herod Antipas – *“ . . . no, neither did Herod, for I sent you back to him; and indeed nothing deserving of death has been done by Him* (Luke 23:15).
  3. Pilate – On at least four separate occasions Pilate speaks concerning the innocence of Jesus. *“Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all”* (John 18:38). *“When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it”* (Matt. 27:24). (See also John 19:4, 6.)
  4. Pilate’s wife – *“When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him”* (Matt. 27:19).
  5. The repentant dying thief – *“And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss”* (Luke 23:39-41).
  6. The Roman centurion – *“Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man”* (Luke 23:47).
  7. The testimony of Paul – *“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him”* (2 Cor. 5:21).
  8. The testimony of Peter – *“But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you”* (Acts 3:14). *“But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot”* (1 Pet. 1:19). *“Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth”* (1 Pet. 2:22).
  9. The testimony of John – *“And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin”* (1 John 3:5).

10. The testimony of Hebrews – *“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin”* (Heb. 4:15). *“For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s: for this he did once, when he offered up himself”* (Heb. 7:26-27).