

What does the Bible teach about: The Sinless Man, Christ Jesus

[The New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]

Today we are considering the amazing truth that the Lord Jesus was, and is, completely sinless. The Bible makes it quite plain that this is so. For instance, let's think about some key witness statements from three of His apostles. The Apostle Peter says in his first letter, chapter 2 and verse 22, about Christ that "[He] committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth." We can read the Apostle Paul's witness in his second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 5 and verse 21: "For He [that is, God] made Him [that is, Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." And then the Apostle John, writing in his first letter, says in chapter 3 and verse 5, "And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin."

The four Gospels, that is, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, all show us that these statements that we have just considered are indeed true. When I read the Gospels, the picture of Jesus that emerges is that of a perfectly good man. It is really worth studying carefully how He acted and responded in the varied situations described. When I do this, I see someone who never acted in self-interest, but always to please God His Father, and always in the best interests of men and women. What He did and said was not always appreciated or popular – but it was always in the best interests of those who heard it. It could be said that our strengths can also become our weaknesses, and vice versa. For example, consider someone who is confident and not overly concerned about what others may think about them. Such a person could be very good at passing on difficult messages when that is needed, but they might be lacking in tact on other occasions. On the other hand, a more sensitive person may be very good at listening to those who need reassurance and special attention, but they may not be honest enough with those who need to hear difficult truths! No doubt you could think of many such contrasts. The description of Jesus in the Gospels presents a perfectly even man. He was stern when He needed to be stern and compassionate and gracious when this was needed. He was angry when it was right to be angry, but calm and unprovoked when it was right to be so. I cannot do justice to this subject here, but I encourage you to read the Gospels and see for yourselves the perfect responses of Jesus to every situation.

This leads me to pose a question: if you or I had wanted to write a fictitious story about a perfect man or a perfect woman, what would he or she have been like? Of course we would need to define what was meant by 'perfect', but for the sake of argument, let's assume that we wanted to write about someone who always acted in the best interests of others, and who was not selfish or self-centred in any way. If we had never heard anything about Jesus, what kind of a person might we have invented? It would be very hard to rise above our own imperfections, for a start. I can't speak for anyone else, but I know only too well how selfish and self-centred I often am! Not being consistently 'others-centred' myself, I would find it difficult to write about an 'others-centred' person. I could, of course, look for inspiration in other people, but as I mentioned earlier, it is often the case that our strengths can also be our weaknesses; our 'goodness' can also be our flaw. The

writers of the Gospels themselves did not hide their own weaknesses or those of their companions. It would be very hard to invent someone who always did the right thing in each circumstance, without leaning too far to the left or to the right. Others have also recognised this difficulty. One such person was the Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky. In one of his books, the hero is a good man called Prince Myshkin. Dostoevsky wrote to his niece about this story. He said, "The basic idea is the representation of a truly perfect and noble man. And this is more difficult than anything else in the world, – particularly nowadays. All writers, not ours alone but foreigners also, who have sought to represent Absolute Beauty, were unequal to the task, for it is an infinitely difficult one. The beautiful is the ideal; but ideals, with us as in civilized Europe, have long been wavering. There is in the world only one figure of absolute beauty: Christ. That infinitely lovely figure is, as a matter of course, an infinite marvel" (the whole Gospel of St. John is full of this thought). [1]

I found that Prince Myshkin came across as a very likeable figure in the novel, but he was somewhat naïve. He did not really command respect, but rather sympathy. He is far from the perfect figure that Christ is. Indeed, Dostoevsky's own words are very telling, that the "*infinitely lovely figure* [of Christ] is, as a matter of course, an infinite marvel." The depiction of Jesus in the Gospels is indeed a marvel. In an initial reading of the Gospels one might focus on the miracles that Jesus performed, but I have found as I read them again that it is His perfect response to every situation that is perhaps more miraculous. My opinion is that such a person could not have been invented. If that is so, then what we read must be the eyewitness accounts of the life of someone who really existed, and who really behaved as described. This is, for me, one of the strongest arguments convincing me of the truth of the Bible – Jesus as described in the Bible could not have been fiction, nor could accounts of His life have been embellished by later writers. I do not think that anyone could have risen above their own nature and written so convincingly about a perfect man. What follows then is that I must take Jesus' claims seriously. If His appearance is an infinite marvel, as Dostoevsky states, then His words must be carefully considered. [2]

Now, a question that sometimes arises in discussions is that we know that the Lord Jesus did no sin, but could He have sinned? Some have said that if He could not, how does that help us in our struggle against temptation? My firm belief is that Scripture makes it plain that He could not and cannot sin, and furthermore, I want to show how that is in fact a great help to us.

Let's consider a few more Scriptures. When we read about His coming into the world, which the angel Gabriel announced to Mary in Luke chapter 1 verse 35, we see the following:

"And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God."

So right from the start of His human life, He was known as the Holy One. What does it mean to be holy? What exactly is holiness? Psalm 45:6-7 gives us a clue, and since this particular passage from the Psalms is quoted in the epistle to the Hebrews and is applied to the Lord Jesus, we know that it is speaking about Him:

"Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions."

We know that Adam and Eve, when they were first created, did not have the knowledge of good and evil, until they ate the forbidden fruit. After that, they did know. But the mere knowledge of

good and evil is not the same as loving righteousness and hating wickedness. Once Adam and Eve they had eaten from the tree, they knew the difference, but they had no power to avoid the wickedness. Jesus is different - He loves righteousness and hates wickedness.

The key point that I want to make is this: it is so helpful for us to have One by our side who cannot sin, and in this way He is our strength and our help. Where we cannot succeed, He certainly can. A key verse is Galatians 2:20:

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

We don't try to become better in our own strength. Instead, we learn to rely on His strength. We have faith in Him, and He lives in us. We're not trying to copy Him, instead, we are depending upon Him.

As an illustration of this approach, let's think about the wisdom that was given to King Solomon. You may remember that God appeared to the young King Solomon in a dream and told him to ask God for what he wanted. Solomon's answer pleased God because he asked God for wisdom. In the first book of Kings, chapter 3 and verse 12, we read God's reply:

"Behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you."

Now this was a wonderful thing, and Solomon certainly was given great wisdom. Sadly, however, in the end, King Solomon turned away from God, despite his wisdom. First Kings chapter 11 and verse 4 tells us,

"For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David."

What Solomon needed to keep going was more than wisdom; he needed a heart that constantly loved righteousness and hated wickedness. We have that in Jesus. Certainly we can ask God for wisdom; the epistle of James chapter 1 and verse 5 teaches us that:

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him."

But furthermore, Christ Jesus is our wisdom. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 1, verses 30-31 we read,

"But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God - and righteousness and sanctification and redemption - that, as it is written, 'He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.'"

In a similar sense, just as He is our wisdom, the Sinless Man Christ Jesus is also our resource for living to please God: 'Christ lives in me,' as I quoted earlier. Of course we often fail - James tells us that in his epistle, chapter 3, verses 1-2:

"My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many things."

But the point is, that having One who cannot sin, we have a perfect resource. He is not the unattainable example. Instead, He is our perfect help and resource!

Now this sounds great, but it might also sound a bit theoretical. How is all that actually going to help us in the nitty gritty of day-to-day temptation? What practical help can we expect to receive? Let me suggest one way - we can receive help through the value and the use of the Word of God. If we think again about the sinless Man Christ Jesus, we can ask ourselves, how did He overcome the devil and resist all temptation? What approach did He take? When we read the accounts of His temptations in the Gospels, we will see that, in every case, He overcame the devil by appropriately quoting and using the Word of God. For example, let's consider Luke's account in chapter 4 of his Gospel. Verses 1 - 4 give us the context and the first temptation:

"Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry. And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." But Jesus answered him, saying, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'""

Jesus was not going to do something for Himself that we could never do, that is, turn stones into bread. That would not have helped us in similar situations, because we do not have that power! Instead, He quoted Scripture and waited for God to provide for Him.

It was the same for the second temptation, as recorded in Luke chapter 4 verses 5-8:

"Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours." And Jesus answered and said to him, "Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'""

We can imagine how repelled the Lord Jesus would have been, to have it suggested to Him that He should worship Satan, but here again, the Lord Jesus uses the Word of God to silence that temptation.

In the third temptation, the devil actually part-quoted some Scripture himself. Luke chapter 4 verses 9 - 12 read as follows:

"Then he brought Him to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'" And Jesus answered and said to him, "It has been said, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'""

Even when the devil mis-applied a Scripture, the Lord Jesus knew the appropriate Scripture to settle the whole matter.

All this means that we can trust the Lord Jesus to help us in our temptations, by bringing appropriate Scriptures to our mind. We can trust His advice to us because we know that He knows how to handle our case. We can do our part by regularly reading and learning the Scriptures, so that we become familiar with them. As it says in Psalm 119 verse 11, "Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You." Note that we need to know the Word of God if we are going to make use of it! As we stay close to the Lord Jesus, He will bring Scriptures and scriptural principles to our mind, through the Holy Spirit, so that we will know what we should do when we are facing temptation and difficult decisions. We will need to ask Him to also give us His courage to apply them. Quite often I might know what is the right thing to do, but part of me doesn't really want to do it. I also need the Lord Jesus's courage and strength for those situations.

Well, we have covered a lot of ground in this talk! To recap, we thought about Jesus the sinless Man, and how that in itself is a miracle. No other human being has been sinless, even though some people have been very good. The sinlessness of Jesus is attested by the evangelists, and described to us in the Gospels. Such a person could not have been invented.

We also considered whether Jesus could have sinned, even though He did not do so. My firm belief is that He could not and cannot sin. As it says in Hebrews chapter 13 and verse 8, "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*" What He was in the time of the Gospels, He is now - "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," as we read in Hebrews chapter 7 and verse 26. This is good news for us, because it means we have One who can never fail who is available to help us. As we trust in Him and depend on Him, He will guide and lead us in the right way. As we considered in first Corinthians chapter 1, verses 30 - 31, He is our righteousness and our sanctification.

Let us close with a prayer, thanking God for the wonderful help and provision we have in the Lord Jesus. Our Father, we thank You so much for sending Your Son, to die for our sins and to become our Saviour. We thank You that He is perfectly loving and perfectly good, so that He will always lead us in the right way. We thank You that we do not have to depend on our own efforts, but that we can rely on Him for all things. What an amazing gift You have given us! We praise You in the Name of the Lord Jesus, Amen.

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today message on The Sinless Man, Christ Jesus, talk number T1151.

Endnote [1]: Letter No 39 in Letters of Fyodor Michailovitch Dostoevsky to his Family and Friends, translated by Ethel Colburn Mayne. 2nd edition. The Macmillan Company, New York, USA, 1917. Public domain material accessed on 11 January 2015 from <https://archive.org/details/lettersfyodormi00eliagoog>

Endnote [2]: The second, third and fourth paragraphs of this transcript are taken (and slightly adapted) from my book, *Fruit for Christ's Labour*, published by Scripture Truth Publications, Crewe, in 2015.

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