

GOOD NEWS FOR THE TEMPTED¹

By Paul Penno Jr.

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Search the Scriptures and you will find keys that Christ had to die to self. How early in His service to humanity can you find evidences that Jesus died to self? How late in His life? This is a “search” more rewarding than any lottery win! Here’s what you will find:

At the age of twelve Jesus dies to self when He says, “I must be about My Father’s business” (Luke 2:49). And what was that “business”? To become “the Lamb of God,” to die for the world.

At His baptism in the River Jordan He told John the Baptist, “Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15). There again we see a denial of self; He bears the cross already.

“I seek not Mine own will,” He says in His early ministry, “but the will of the Father which hath sent Me” (John 5:30). To “seek not” His own will—isn’t that dying to self?

Maybe someone will be shocked at the idea that Jesus had a “will” of His own that needed to be denied in order for Him to follow His Father’s will! But we read this over and over again—opening up a reality in the heart of Jesus that youth desperately need to know about. He knew self-denial!

¹ James 1:2-4. “My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less”, “A Shelter in the Time of Storm.”

“I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me” (John 6:38). Imagine that! There it is: the Son of God took upon His sinless nature our human nature, in its fallen condition where self had to die or He could never have followed His Father’s will. If Titus 2:11 tells us to say “No to ungodliness and worldly lusts,” if we must deny self, surely our Master has shown us the way by His own example. This is the secret that explains how Jesus “took” our fallen, sinful nature and yet did not sin. His life on earth was one unending series of denials of self!

What about later in His life? Was He tempted then? He accepted the high priest’s law that “it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not” (John 11:50). Jesus chose to be that “one man.”

In Gethsemane He prayed, “O My Father, . . . not as I will, but as Thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39). Self said to Him, “Don’t throw Your life away like this! Go back to heaven where You belong; these people aren’t worth saving!” But again Jesus denied self; yes, He bore the cross all His life, and Calvary was just the final demonstration of it.

Scripture is clear that Christ must be perceived in His truth if sin is to be “taken away”: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). “Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth” (Isa. 45:22). “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me” (John

12:32). The “glory” which lightens the earth in the closing work of the gospel must of necessity be a revelation of the crucified Christ, because He alone is glory (Rev. 18:1; Jn. 12:28, 33).

It is not with physical eyesight that men can “behold” Christ. The “glory” must be perceived by faith. It follows that the revelation of Christ is the clear and fully truthful “word of faith, which we preach” (Rom. 10:6-9).

That study of Christ is the answer to the problem. Jesus declared, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” Such knowledge of Christ is not only theology (the knowledge of the Father), but knowledge about our human nature as well: “No man cometh unto the Father but by Me” (John 15:6).

Christ’s human nature is the bridgehead vital to a union of the divine nature to our own fallen human nature. Thus Christ is the “way,” and His flesh is the “new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us” (Heb. 10:22).

It is not surprising that the enemy’s attempts to confuse and mystify our faith in Christ are directed at this bridgehead of His real humanity. Once the idea is injected into our understanding, however subtle it may be, that Christ’s “flesh” was not the same as ours, that He did not know the same fight with temptation that we know, His conflict becomes a meaningless abstraction, a conflict and yet no conflict, temptation and yet not what we know as temptation. Christ becomes a being without relation

to man, and incapable of attracting His sympathy. His prayers to His Father for help “with strong crying and tears” assume a melodramatic aspect, a fraudulent “example” to us rather than His own desperately sincere appeal from a breaking heart.

It is beyond the average Christian, including youth, to grasp that this “example” is more than an acted pretence. No firm bond of sympathy exists, and hence no sense of contrition is possible. We are urged to “pray” as Jesus did, but our heart is blank. Especially the Cross is obscured. An impenetrable mystery surrounds the very phase of Christ’s work which was intended to appeal to human hearts and intelligence and draw them to a sincere, unaffected reconciliation with God.

The true knowledge of Christ, is intended to appeal to human *hearts*, as well as satisfy divine justice and human logic: “The atonement of Christ was not made in order to induce God to love those whom He otherwise hated; it was not made to produce a love that was not in existence, but it was made as a manifestation of the love that was already in God’s heart. . . . The death of Christ was expedient in order that mercy *might* reach us with its pardoning power, and at the same time that justice might be satisfied in the righteous substitute.”²

Did Christ bear a relation to sinful man that is capable of producing that dynamic contrition which

² Ellen G. White, “Christ Our Complete Salvation,” *Signs of the Times*, May 30, 1895.

cleanses the heart from all egoism? Scripture says that He was sent “in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.” How did He condemn “sin in the flesh”? By coming “in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin,” living a life of perfect righteousness in that flesh. His was a corporate identity with sinful man, but without sin, because He “condemned sin in the flesh.” In other words, the atonement stands or falls on whether or not that flesh is our flesh, whether or not His nature which He took upon “His sinless nature” was our nature.

“Sinful nature” is not synonymous with “sinning nature.” A sinful nature does not require participation in sin. A “sinful nature” is not necessarily one that participates in sin, but which *could* participate, or is *able* to participate in sin. Christ “took upon His sinless nature our sinful nature” (MM 181), which is to say that He *could* have sinned. The nature He assumed was such that temptation to Him was just as alluring and just as strong as it is to us who participate in sin, with the exception of passion or propensity which follows rather than precedes participation in sin. It is in this sense that Christ “took” [possessed] a sinful nature while at the same time He was completely sinless. Here is the glory of “Christ’s righteousness” which can be imputed and imparted to the sinner who believes. To assert that Christ not only possessed a sinless nature (which is true) but also did not

partake of our fallen, sinful nature, would be to exempt Him from the temptations of fallen man and limit His redemption and atonement to the one (historic) original sin of Adam. The definition of Christ’s sinlessness and participation in our sinful nature is expressed by Ellen White:

“It would have been an almost infinite humiliation for the Son of God to take man’s nature, even when Adam stood in his innocence in Eden. But Jesus accepted humanity when the race had been weakened by four thousand years of sin. Like every child of Adam He accepted the results of the working of the great law of heredity. What these results were is shown in the history of His earthly ancestors. He came with such a heredity to share our sorrows and temptations, and to give us the example of a sinless life.”³

“Heredity” is the sum of qualities and potentialities genetically derived from ancestry through the mechanism in the chromosomes. Predilections and tendencies may be “inherited” only in that the weakened physical constitution is rendered more vulnerable to temptation. Sin or character is not transmitted through heredity. Neither is righteousness (FE 87). Therefore Christ, through the “working of the great law of heredity” did not inherit guilt or participation in sin; and it is equally true that from His heavenly Father He did not

³ *The Desire of Ages*, p. 48.

receive an inherent righteousness in His flesh (or mind).

This fact is important to be borne in mind when the concept of the “righteousness of Christ,” so frequently referred to the writings of Ellen G. White and in Scripture, is cited. The usual common concepts are that Christ was inherently righteous and genetically incapable of sin—both ideas being scientifically and Scripturally unreasonable.

Christ “felt the strength” of our temptations, and had no advantage beyond ours: “The enmity referred to in the prophecy in Eden was not to be confined merely to Satan and the Prince of life. It was to be universal. . . .

“The enmity put between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman was supernatural. With Christ the enmity was in one sense natural; in another sense it was supernatural, as humanity and divinity were combined.”⁴

When we talk about our “tendency” to sin, inspiration does not mean guilt or participation in sin. Natural tendencies make it easy to choose false paths (FE 329), but the tendencies are not the sinful choices themselves.

Would it have been “easy” for Christ to sin? We should be exceedingly careful before we answer hastily No (Heb. 12:2-4; 1:15). Aid is assured us in overcoming hereditary tendencies (SD 355), but are

we sure that Christ was exempt from such “overcoming”? If so, how could we understand His words, “To him that overcometh . . . even as I also overcame” (Rev. 3:21)? There must be a very close parallel between Christ’s overcoming and our overcoming.

Remove from Christ the *temptation within* and we remove from Him all relevance to fallen man. This misunderstanding is the foundation of the monastic way of life. Monks isolate themselves from the surrounding world living in cloisters so that they won’t be tempted by the world. They live in a vacuum environment sealed off from the world. They think this self-denial keeps them from temptation and thus they can develop a righteous life.

If He could be tempted only by a stimulations from without perceived by outward physical senses, the third temptation in the wilderness loses meaning (Matt. 4:8-10), because it was obviously a vision which Satan presented to Christ, which vision Christ perceived with His mind and not with His physical eyes. “Satan caused the kingdoms of the world, in all their glory, to pass in panoramic view before Him” (DA 129).

By daydreaming, letting our thoughts wander loosely, by cherishing hatred, lust, covetousness, we may sin even though we dwell alone in the cloister or desert. Was Jesus exempt from this temptation?

⁴ *Selected Messages*, Vol. 1, p. 254.

“Christians should not be controlled by tendencies” (TM 259). If Christians have tendencies, but must not be controlled by them, it must be understood that tendencies are therefore the capacity and potential receptivity for temptation, a potential for sin *if* the sinful choice is made, but not sin without the sinful choice. If there is no choice to sin, they remain merely temptation.

On the other hand, “propensities” and “passions” are different. They are known only by those who have participated in sin. They follow the act of sin.

For example, someone may have a definite tendency toward intemperance. Heaven only knows what he would have been were it not for Christ who has redeemed him! But he does not have a propensity for intoxicating drinks because he has never tasted them. But his tendency toward intemperance makes it imperative that he not begin tasting alcohol. Could Christ have drunk intoxicating beverages freely and safely? Could He have committed *any sin only once*?

Here is the heart of the problem that demands definition. Man cannot sin “only once.” *Tendency* indulged always triggers into *propensity*. Had Christ yielded to one sin, He would have repeated our transgression, and the same process would have followed.

Then what is His relation to a tendency to a sinful potential? The only possible answer in the light of Scripture and Spirit of Prophecy assertions: His

capacity was identical to ours because He came “in the flesh,” as John says. This is the meaning of the phrase, “in the likeness of sinful flesh.”

Christ established complete and perfect identity with fallen man that He might be his perfect Redeemer. “We need to realize the truth of Christ’s manhood in order to appreciate the truth of the above words (“He sweat as it were great drops of blood”). It was not a make-believe humanity that Christ took upon Himself. He took human nature and lived human nature. . . . His divine nature knew what was in man. He needed not that any should testify to Him of this.” (5BC 1124).

“Christ’s overcoming and obedience is that of a true human being. In our conclusions, we make mistakes because of our erroneous views of the human nature of our Lord. When we give to His human nature a power that it is not possible for man to have in his conflicts with Satan, we destroy the completeness of His humanity.

“. . . He came not to our world to give the obedience of a lesser God to a greater, but as a man to obey God’s Holy Law, and in this way He is our example. The Lord Jesus Christ came to our world, not to reveal what a God could do, but what a man could do, through faith in God’s power to help in every emergency” (7BC 929).

“His mind, like yours, could be harassed and perplexed. . . . Jesus was exposed to hardships, to conflict and temptation as a man” (OHC 57).

“Jesus was sinless and had no dread of the consequences of sin. With this exception, His condition was as yours” (OHC 59).

“We need not place the obedience of Christ by itself, as something for which He was particularly adapted. . . . If He had a special power which it is not the privilege of man to have, Satan would have made capital of this matter” (7 BC 930).

Here is the true Christ who is relevant to the needs of every sinner on earth. Here is the Christ the contemplation of whom arouses the contrition and faith which dissipates lukewarmness and complacency. Here is the Christ who engages the interest and sympathy of human beings because the reality of His kinship with them is clarified.

Christ’s battle is the battle of every sinner with “self,” whose loving promise is relevant: “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame” (Rev. 3:21).

Christ was “made under the law” not merely in the sense of subjection to Jewish rites and ordinances not binding on us, but in the sense of being under the conditions of finiteness that put pressure on us to self-seeking which we know. He was “made under the law” as He was “made to be sin” (2 Cor. 5:21), but He did not yield to sin. He did not surrender to the impelling force of self-seeking, but He knew the strength of its undertow as fully as any of us.

Born in the river which sweeps us into sin, He yet

stood firm as a rock. Christ had a self (John 5:30; 6:38; Matt. 26:39; and Romans 15:1-3). What distinguished Him from us as regards His “overcoming” was that the principle of the Cross was operative in His whole experience from the age of accountability to the final cry of victory, “It is finished.” He “pleased not Himself.”

Someone says, “Wait a minute! Jesus couldn’t be tempted to be selfish, could He? We don’t want to make Him *too* human, do we?” In response we need to note several things:

To be tempted is not the same as to sin. Temptation is not sin; a thousand temptations do not equal one sin. Therefore Jesus could “in all points [be] tempted like as we are” yet not never once give in to commit sin (Heb. 4:15). It seems to me that you are confusing temptation with sin, making the two to be equivalent. It is possible to be tempted and yet not sin. This is abundantly demonstrated in Scripture. Our first parents did not need to yield to the serpent’s temptation; Christ was tempted of the devil in Mt. 4, yet He did not yield. Joseph was tempted by Potiphar’s wife, yet by the grace of a Saviour and through faith in Him he resisted. According to the NIV, it is possible to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly lusts (Tit 2:11; the KJV says “deny,” as to deny self in Mt 16:24).

Very true, Christ “knew no sin.” But that does not mean that He knew no temptation to sin. To equate temptation with sin is to destroy the reality of the

incarnation. Heb. 4:15 says that He was “in all points tempted like as *we are*,” not merely “like as” Adam was tempted. “Forasmuch then as *the children* are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same that He might . . . succor them that are tempted.” He cannot save what He has not assumed, nor can He reach those to whom He has not come near. His name is Immanuel, God *with* us.

That does not mean that He must indulge in our sin; it only means that He must know the strengths of our temptation in order to succor us who are tempted. To be “separate from sinners” does not require a Roman Catholic Immaculate Conception wherein He is disconnected from the human race, as Fulton Sheen, says.

We must not make Heb. 7:26 to contradict Heb. 2:14-18 or Luke 15:2. What is the context of Heb. 7:26? Is it not His High Priestly ministry set forth in contrast to the earthly high priests? The context does not suggest that Jesus did not come to us where we are. He is “holy, harmless, undefiled” in that He never yielded to temptation.

“Sin dwelleth in me,” true; and sin never dwelt in Him. But the grand truth is that He was “made to be sin for us, who knew no sin.” He was “made under the law.” His own words are an inspired commentary on Paul’s pregnant phrase—Jn. 5:30; 6:38; Mt. 26:39. He “took” on His sinless nature our sinful nature that He might know how to succor

them that are tempted, in that He “took” a self as we have a self, a self that needed to be denied, to be “crucified.” He bore the cross all His life, not only on Calvary’s hill. He could not follow His Father’s will unless He “denied” His “own will.” He tells us so, plainly. Christ was totally unselfish, but unselfishness implies resistance of the temptation to be selfish. Whereas He always denied self, we have yielded to self and we are selfish. Christ’s righteousness is infinitely greater than Adam’s sinlessness.

Jesus did for sure become human; and we dare not limit His humanity, for John tells us that if we do, we end up being Antichrist (1 John 4:1-3). He was “in all things . . . made like unto His brethren” (Heb. 2:17). His name is “Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Matt. 1:23)—humanity combined with divinity.

We must remember that the humanity which Christ became, Himself to be [or assumed], was not the sinless, unfallen humanity of Adam in Eden. He came from heaven specifically to solve the problem of sin where it dwells in fallen, sinful human nature. If He sidesteps taking that same humanity where the problem is for all of us, He opens Himself up to the charge of being unfair in the contest. Who could believe a dishonest Savior?

We must remember that temptation to indulge self was as strong for Him as it is for us—stronger in fact. Nobody could have more fervently abhorred

being crucified, than was Jesus. His whole soul shrunk from the ordeal. Listen to Him pray, "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me" (Matt. 26:39). Sweet little, mild prayer? No, read on: He screamed, He shook like in an earthquake, David says He "cried out" (Ps. 22:1, 2; 69:3). He sweat actual drops of blood (have you, ever? Luke 22:44).

This perfect "likeness" of His nature with yours and mine, His humanity being formed with a self as is ours—a self which had to be denied if He should follow His Father's will—all this makes Jesus our perfect Savior, "able to save perfectly those who come unto God by Him" (Heb. 7:25).

When you are tempted you say to yourself: I am bad; is the Lord in me now? I believe He was there in that good meeting, when every one was happy. But here I am alone, and feeling depressed, and everything goes wrong, and the enemy is tempting me, and I feel as though the Lord had left me. By and by when this temptation passes, and I feel better, and as though the Lord is with me, I will confess it then.

But it is in the trial that we need Him with us. It was the same in the temptation in the wilderness. Weakened by fasting, His visage "marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men," a wanderer in the desert, the devil comes to Him and says, "You do not look much like the Son of God." Himself coming as an angel of light, he tries

to make out that Christ is an imposter. He says, If you are the Son of God, you created all things. Why don't you take the stones and satisfy your hunger?

And Christ knew that He could have done it. He knew that He was the Son of God in the wilderness, just as well as when at the supper, He washed the feet of the disciples as an humble One, He knew "that He was coming from God, and went to God." He held to the word of God all through His temptation. He confessed, and declared the name of the Lord, witnessing a good confession.

That is what it means to confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. It does not mean simply on certain occasions when there seems to be a wave of glory sweeping over the congregation, and we are moved in spite of ourselves. It is so just as much when we are physically helpless. It is just as true when the enemy is pressing us with temptations. It is as much so when afflictions are pressing about us, as when all is pleasant and clear. To confess is to hold the word of God as true continually. And the value of confession is confessing it in the heart. "Believe in thine heart." "This word shall be in thine heart." Let not the enemy snatch it away.

It is only by the fixed knowledge, through His word, that God is with us, that we can ever resist any temptation. So when the enemy comes in like a flood, let the Spirit of the Lord lift up the standard against him in your heart. "I am crucified with Christ;

nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). Keep “the faith of Jesus,” and victory is yours.

In a time of business recession a fellow lost his job, a sizable fortune, and his beautiful home. To add to his sorrow, his precious wife died; yet he tenaciously held to his faith—the only thing he had left.

One day when he was out walking in search of employment, he stopped to watch some men who were doing stonework on a large church. One of them was chiseling a triangular piece of rock. “Where are you going to put that?” he asked. The workman said, “Do you see that little opening up there near the spire? Well, I’m shaping this stone down here so that it will fit in up there.” Tears filled his eyes as he walked away, for the Lord had spoken to him through that laborer whose words gave new meaning to his troubled situation.

Are you having a battle with self? So did Jesus! Have you ever given in to self? He did not! But the reason why He “ever liveth” is to give you and me forgiveness *and* victory.

There is no time when one would naturally feel less that the Lord is with him than when being sorely tempted. But that is the very time when we must know and confess: “Every spirit that confesseth that

Jesus Christ is come *in the flesh* is of God” (1 John 4:8).