

Salvation—The Person and Work of Christ

(2nd)

(Today we continue studying the Person and work of Christ in connection to salvation. We are discussing the impeccability of Christ and the virgin birth.)

From previous studies we saw that because of the fall and depravity of man, that man cannot save himself. We also found that remission or forgiveness of sins can only be by blood (Hebrews 9:22) and that the blood of sheep, goats, calves, doves, pigeons, or any other animal cannot take away sins, Hebrews 10:11. It is further manifested that since man is a sinner and under just condemnation by God, his blood cannot take away sins. Therefore, salvation can only be by the God-man—Christ Jesus, II Timothy 1:9. Furthermore, it was established that the God-man includes the second Person of the Trinity—the eternal Word (John 1:1-4, 14), and that He was and is not only without sin but He could not sin; that is, Jesus Christ was impeccable in human flesh. I would like to supply some quotes from various authors regarding the impeccability of Christ.

The Greek scholar, A. T. Robertson, said regarding the expression “without sin” in Hebrews 4:15, “This is the outstanding difference that must never be overlooked in considering the actual humanity of Jesus. He did not yield to sin. But more than this is true. There was no latent sin in Jesus to be stirred by temptation and no habits of sin to be overcome. But he did have ‘weaknesses’ (*astheneiai*) common to our human nature (hunger, thirst, weariness, etc.). Satan used his strongest weapons against Jesus, did it repeatedly, and failed. Jesus remained ‘undefiled’ (*amiantos*) in a world of sin (Joh 8:46). This is our ground of hope, the sinlessness of Jesus and his real sympathy.”

Commenting on the same verse, John Gill wrote, “there was no sin in his nature; though he was encompassed about with infirmities, yet not with sinful infirmities, only sinless ones; nor was there any sin in his temptations; though he was solicited to sin by Satan, yet he could find none in him to work upon; nor could he draw him into the commission of any sin.”

Jamison, Faussett and Brown Commentary gives the following: Greek, “*choris*,” “separate from sin” (Heb 7:26). If the Greek “*aneu*” had been used, *sin* would have been regarded as the object absent from Christ the subject; but *choris* here implies that Christ, the *subject*, is regarded as separated from sin the object [TITTMANN]. Thus, throughout His temptations in their origin, process, and result, sin had nothing in Him; He was apart and separate from it [ALFORD].”

The comments of R. L. Dabney are quiet apropos: “The old doctrine of the Reformed Churches asserted not only the actual sinlessness, which none but violent infidels impugn, but the impeccability of our Redeemer. In recent days, some of whom better things should have been expected, deny the latter. They concede to the God-man the *posse non peccare* [the power not to sin—JKB]: but deny to Him, or at least to the humanity, the *non posse peccare*. Their plea is in substance, that a being must be peccable in order to experience temptation, to be meritorious for resisting it, and to be an exemplar and encouragement to us, who are tempted. Thus argue Ullman, Farrar, the author of “*Ecce Deus*,” Dr. Schaff, and even Dr. Hodge; while Dr. Dörner, in his “*History of Protestant Theol.*,” revives the Nestorian and Pelagian doctrine, of a meritorious growth or progress of Christ’s humanity from peccability to impeccability, by virtue of the holy use of His initial contingency and selfdetermination of will.” *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, pp. 470-471.

Lest someone think that Dabney misrepresented Charles Hodge, allow me to quote from his systematic theology. Hodge wrote, “This sinlessness of our Lord, however, does not amount to absolute impeccability. It was not a *non potest peccare*. 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.” *Systematic Theology*, Volume II, Part III, Chapter IV, “The Mediatorial Work of Christ,” p. 457.

From these quotes, of which many more could be supplied, one can see the importance of the impeccability of Christ. As we said in our previous podcast, “What can such expressions as ‘without blemish,’ ‘without spot,’ ‘holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners,’ and One Who ‘knew no sin’ mean other than one who was sinless in every way?” Truly, we must believe the infallible Holy Scriptures of God rather than be led astray by the human logic and reason of man. Yea, as with all things, let us affirm with the Scriptures, “let God be true, but every man a liar,” Romans 3:4. Therefore, His manhood was unique in that He not only did not sin, He could not sin.

This raises the question as to how it is that Second Person of the Trinity could take on human flesh. Before we discuss this I want to be clear in saying that there is much about this topic that we are unable to answer. Theologians and Bible scholars have for centuries discuss this divine intervention and, sad to say, often speculated about many things regarding the incarnation. Volumes have been written and numerous sermons have been preached and abundant lectures have been given about this subject, and it is obvious that we will not exhaust the subject in our small studies. Also our desire concerning this issue is to limit our investigation of the incarnation to our overall topic—salvation.

The prophet Isaiah spoke of the incarnation saying, “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel,” Isaiah 7:14. Furthermore, he prophesied, “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given,” Isaiah 9:6a. Of the first prophesy quoted, it is found in the Gospel of Matthew in connection with the angel of the Lord appearing to Joseph telling him that Mary was with child by the work of the Holy Spirit and that the child was to be called Jesus. Then it is recorded, “Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us,” Matthew 1:22-23. We do not know how long Mary was with child at this time, but we know that prior to this the angel Gabriel had already spoken to her regarding the conception and birth of Jesus. Luke in his gospel tells us that Gabriel appeared to Mary when John was six months old in the womb of her cousin Elisabeth, Luke 1:26.

Furthermore, we are told by the prophet Isaiah and by Luke the physician that a virgin would conceive and that her name was Mary, Isaiah 7:14; Luke 1:27. Critics and professed scholars that question the truth of the Scriptures say that the Hebrew and Greek words translated virgin should be a young maid. But when the angel Gabriel visited Mary to announce the birth of Jesus, Luke 1:34 declares, “Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?” Such detractors cast iniquity against Mary by denying her virginity. However, we must not go to the opposite extreme by saying that Mary was sinless. No. She was a sinner and needed redemption like the rest of sinful men. Luke 1:30 declares, “And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.” The Greek word for “favour” is *χάρις* (pronounced *chárís*) and is the word for grace. In fact, this Greek word is found one hundred and fifty-six times in the New Testament and one hundred and thirty times it is translated grace. This same word is used in the famous verse regarding salvation: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God,” Ephesians 2:8. Mary was chosen by God as the one in whom Christ was to come to secure redemption by the grace of God. No doubt Mary desired and lived in such a way as to be a virgin and she is to be commended for her virginity and holy living, yet it was by the grace of God.

(Allow me to interject at this point that we deny the doctrine of Immaculate Conception. Many people think that term is speaking of Christ being preserved from the effect of sin or of His sinless conception and birth. However, the doctrine of Immaculate Conception is a Roman Catholic belief asserting that Mary was preserved free from the effects of the sin of Adam from the first instant of her conception. No, Mary was in need of a Savior as we are.)

There have been many books written seeking to explain naturally how Christ could have been born of a sinful virgin and not be sinful Himself. Various theories have been advanced. One is the idea that the sinfulness of man is derived through the blood line of the male and not the female. There may be some natural evidence to support this, but Job 14:4 declares, “Who can bring a clean *thing* out of an unclean? not one.” We must not try to explain the incomprehensible by human reason and logic. We need to apply the same rule regarding the virgin birth of Christ as that given concerning the responsibility of man for his sins and the salvation of God by His mercy: “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?” (Romans 9:20.) It is enough for the believer to know that the Scriptures declare that a virgin conceived and bore Jesus Christ. After all, what is a believer but someone who simply believes God, and he can only believe God concerning these things (as with all other things) by believing what the Scriptures say.

Equally, the Scriptures declare that the One born of Mary is called Immanuel (Emmanuel) “which being interpreted is, God with us,” Matthew 1:23. Equally, Luke 1:35 declare that He is called “the Son of God.”

The Lord willing, we plan to discuss more about the Son given as prophesied in Isaiah 9:6 in our next podcast because time will not allow us to do so today. Farewell.