

GLEANINGS IN THE GODHEAD

**Part 2: Excellencies Which
Pertain to God the Son as Christ**

Section Six

**The Quintessence,
Leadership and the
Impeccability of Christ.**

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The Quintessence of Christ

The Lord Jesus uttered a gracious invitation which is accompanied by a precious promise—"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29)—and then He proceeded to make known the conditions of that promise. To those whose consciences are weighted down by a burden of guilt and who are anxious for relief, He says, "Come unto me and rest." But His rest can only be obtained as we meet His requirements: that we take His "yoke" upon us, and that we "learn" of Him. Taking Christ's yoke upon us consists of surrendering our wills to Him, submitting to His authority, consenting to be ruled by Him (see the previous booklet 'The Yoke of Christ'). Now consider what it means to "learn" of Him.

Christ is the antitypical Prophet, to whom all of the Old Testament prophets pointed. He alone was personally qualified to fully make known the will of God. "God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in time past unto the fathers, by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son" (Heb. 1:1-2). Christ is the grand Teacher of His Church, all others are subordinate to and appointed by Him. "He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets: and some

evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-12). Christ is the chief Shepherd and Feeder of His flock, His undershepherds learn of and receive from Him. Christ is the personal Word in whom and through whom the divine perfections are illustriously displayed. “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (John 1:18). So we must come to Christ to be instructed in heavenly doctrine and built up in our holy faith.

“Learn of me.” Christ is not only the final Spokesman of God, the One by whom the divine will is fully uttered, but also He is also the grand Exemplar set before His people. Christ did more than proclaim the Truth, He became the embodiment of it. He did more than utter the will of God; He was the personal exemplification of it. The divine requirements were perfectly set forth in the character and conduct of the Lord Jesus. And therein He differed radically from all who went before Him, and all who come after Him. The lives of the prophets (Old Testament) and the apostles (New Testament) shed scattered rays of light, but they were merely reflections of *the* Light. Christ is “the Sun of righteousness,” therefore fully qualified to say, “learn of me.” There was no error in His teaching, nor the slightest blemish in His character, or flaw in His conduct. The life He lived presents to us a perfect standard of holiness, a perfect pattern for us to follow.

When His enemies asked, “Who art thou?” He answered, “even the same that I said unto you from the beginning” (John 8:25). The force of that remarkable answer (expressed in the Greek) is brought out yet more plainly in *Bagster’s Interlinear* and the margin of the American Revised Version, “Altogether that which I also spoke unto thee.” In reply to their interrogation, the Son of God affirmed that He was essentially and absolutely what He declared Himself to be. I have spoken of “light;” I *am* that light. I have spoken of “truth;” I *am* that

truth—the incarnation, personification, and exemplification thereof. None but He could really say I *am* Myself what I am speaking to you about. The child of God may speak the truth and walk in the truth, but He is not the truth. Christ is! A Christian may let his light shine, but he is not the light. Christ was, and therein we see His exalted uniqueness. “We may know him that is true” (1 John 5:20); not “him who taught the truth,” but “him that is true.”

Because the Lord Jesus could make this claim—“I am altogether that which I spoke unto thee:” I am the living embodiment, the personal exemplification of all which I teach, that He is a perfect Pattern for us to follow—that He can say, “Learn of me.” “He has left us an example, that we should follow His steps” (1 Pet. 2:21). Since we bear His name (Christians) we should imitate His holiness. “Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). The best of men are but men at the best. They have their errors and defects, which they freely acknowledge; therefore where they differ from Christ it is our duty to differ from them. No man, however wise or holy, is a perfect rule for other men. The standard of perfection is in Christ alone; He is the rule of every Christian’s walk. “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:12). Though we fall far short of teaching such a standard in this life, nothing short of it should be our aim.

“He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk even as he walked” (1 John 2:6). Many reasons might be given in proof of “ought.” It is vain for any man to profess he is a Christian unless he evidences that it is both his desire and endeavour to follow the example Christ left His people. As the Puritans said, “Let him either put on the life of Christ, or put off the name of Christ; let him show the hand of a Christian in works of holiness and obedience, or else the tongue and language of a Christian must gain no belief or credit.” God has

predestinated His people “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom. 8:29). The work was begun here and perfected after death, but that work is not consummated in heaven unless it is commenced on earth. “We may as well hope to be saved without Christ, as to be saved without conformity to Christ” (John Flavel).

This practical conformity between God’s Son and His sons is indispensable to their relation in grace, this relationship between body and head. Believers are members of a living organism of which Christ is the Head; of members, “By one Spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13); of Christ, “and [God] gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:22-23). The two together (members and Head) form Christ-mystical. Now as Christ, the Head, is pure and holy, so also must be the members. An animal with a human head would be a monstrosity. For the sensual and godless to claim oneness to Christ is to misrepresent Him before the world, as though His mystical Body were like the image of Nebuchadnezzar, with the head of fine gold and the feet of iron and clay (Dan. 2:32 ff.).

This resemblance to Christ appears necessary from the communion which all believers have with Him in the same Spirit of grace and holiness. Christ is the “Firstborn among many brethren,” and God anointed Him “with the oil of gladness above thy fellows” (Psa. 45:7). That oil of gladness is an emblem of the Holy Spirit, and God gives the same to each of the fellows or partners. Where the same Spirit and principle is, there the same fruits and works must be produced, according to the proportions of the Spirit of grace bestowed. This is the very reason the Holy Spirit is given to believers. “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by

the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18).

Also, the very honour of Christ demands conformity of Christians to His example. In what other way can they close the mouths of those who reject their Master and vindicate His blessed name from the reproaches of the world? How can Wisdom be justified of her children except in this way? The wicked will not read the inspired record of His life in the Scriptures; therefore there is all the more need to have His excellencies set before them in the lives of His people. The world sees what we practice, as well as hears what we profess. Unless there is consistency between our profession and practice we cannot glorify Christ before a world which has cast Him out.

Then, there must be an inward conformity to Christ before there can be any resemblance on the outside. There must be an experimental oneness before there can be a practical likeness. How can we possibly be conformed to Him in external acts of obedience unless we are conformed to Him in those springs from which such actions proceed? We must live in the Spirit before we can walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5), for the mind should regulate all our other faculties. Therefore we are told, “For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Rom. 8:6). What was “the mind which was in Christ Jesus?” It was that of self-abnegation and devotedness to the Father. That we must begin with inward conformity to Christ is evident from our text; after saying “learn of me.” He at once added, “for I am meek and lowly in heart.”

We need to attend closely to our Lord’s order in this passage, insisting we cannot possibly “learn” of Him (in the sense meant here) until we have taken His “yoke” upon us, until we surrender ourselves to Him. It is not merely to an intellectual learning of Him which Christ calls us, but to an experimental, effectual, and transforming learning; and in order to obtain that

we must be completely subject to Him. John Newton suggested that there is yet another relation between these two things: not only is our taking of Christ's yoke upon us an indispensable requirement for our learning of Him, but also our learning of Him is His duly appointed means to enable us to wear His yoke.

“Learn of me.” Be not afraid to come to Me for help and instruction, “for I am meek and lowly in heart.” Here is encouragement. You need not hesitate to come to such a One, the Maker of heaven and earth, King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the One before whom all the angels of heaven prostrate themselves in homage, yet the One who is the Friend of sinners. He is able to solve our every problem and supply strength for the weakest; because He is Man, possessed of human sensibilities, therefore is He capable of being “touched with the feeling of our infirmities.”

“Learn of me.” I know why these things appear so hard. It is owing to the pride and impatience of your hearts. To remedy this, take Me for your example; I require nothing of you but what I have performed before you, and on your account: in that path I mark out for you, you may perceive My own footsteps all the way. This is a powerful argument, a sweet recommendation, the yoke of Christ, to those who love Him, that He bore it Himself. He is not like the Pharisees, whom He censured (Matthew 23:4) on this very account: who bound heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and laid them on men's shoulders, but they themselves would not move them with one of their fingers.

1. Are you terrified with the difficulties attending *your profession*: disheartened by hard usage, or too ready to show resentment against those who oppose you? Learn of Jesus, admire and imitate His constancy: “Consider him who endured the contradiction of sinners against himself” (Heb. 12:3). Make a comparison (so the word imports) between yourself and Him, between the contradiction which He endured and that which

you are called to struggle with; then surely you will be ashamed to complain. Admire and imitate His meekness: when He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; He wept for His enemies, and prayed for His murderers. Let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

2. Do you find it hard to walk steadfastly in His *precepts*, especially in some particular instances, when the maxims of worldly prudence and the pleadings of flesh and blood, are strongly against you? Learn of Jesus. He pleased not Himself (Rom. 15:3): He considered not what was safe and easy, but what was the will of His heavenly Father. Entreat Him to strengthen you with strength in your soul, that as you bear the name of His disciples, you may resemble Him in every part of your conduct, and shine as lights in a dark and selfish world, to the glory of His grace.

3. “Are you tempted to repine at the dispensations of Divine *providence*? Take Jesus for your pattern. Did He say, when the unspeakable sufferings He was to endure for sinners were just coming upon Him, “The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11); and shall we presume to have a will of our own? especially when we further reflect, that as His sufferings were wholly on our account, so all our sufferings are by His appointment, and all designed by Him to promote our best, that is our spiritual and eternal welfare?” (John Newton).

“Learn of me.” Christ, then, taught His disciples not only by precept, but also by example, not only by word of mouth but also by His own perfect life of obedience to the Father’s will. When He uttered these words (Matthew 11:29) He was wearing the “yoke” and personally exemplifying meekness and lowliness. What a perfect Teacher, showing us in His own selflessness what these graces really are. He did not associate with the noble and mighty, but made fishermen His ambassadors and sought out the most despised, so that He was dubbed “a friend of publicans and sinners.”

“And learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.” Those heavenly graces, the roots from which all other spiritual excellencies spring, can only be learned from Christ. The colleges and seminaries cannot impart them, preachers and churches cannot bestow them, no self-culture can attain unto them. They can only be learned experimentally at the feet of Christ, only as we take His yoke upon us. They can only be learned as we commune with Him and follow the example He left us. They can only be learned as we pray that we may be more fully conformed to His image and trustfully seek the enablement of His Spirit to “mortify the deeds of the body.”

What causes have we to mourn that there is so little meekness and lowliness in us! How we need to confess unto God our lamentable deficiency. Yet, merely mourning does not improve matters. We must go to the root of our folly and judge it. Why have I failed to learn these heavenly graces? Has it not to be said of me, as of Israel, “Ephraim is a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke?” Not until my proud spirit is broken and my will completely surrendered to Christ, can I truly “learn of Him.”

And taking Christ’s yoke upon us and learning of Him is a daily thing. Christianity is far more than a creed or ethical code—it is a being conformed practically to the image of God’s Son. So many make the great mistake in supposing that coming to Christ and taking His yoke is a single act, which may be done once and for all. Not so! It is to be a continuous and daily act, “To whom coming [again and again], as unto a living stone” (1 Pet. 2:4). We need to continue as we began. The mature Christian who has been fifty years in the way needs Christ as urgently now as he did the first moment he was convicted of his lost condition. He needs to daily take His yoke and learn of Him.

The Leadership of Christ

“For My yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:30). As pointed out (see ‘The Quintessence of Christ’) the

yoke, employed figuratively, is the symbol of service. Such an instrument united oxen together in pulling the plough or wagon, so they worked for their master. Our text refers to the service of Christ, in contrast to the service of sin and Satan. The devil promises his subjects a grand time if they follow his promptings, but sooner or later they discover, “the way of transgressors is hard” (Prov. 13:15). Sin deceives. Its deluded victims imagine they enjoy liberty while indulging the lusts of the flesh; but when failing health suggests they had better change their ways, they discover they are bound by habits they cannot break. Sin is a more cruel taskmaster than were the Egyptians to the Hebrews. And the service of Satan imposes far heavier burdens than Pharaoh ever placed upon his slaves. But “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

This declaration of the Saviour may also be the sequel to His opening words in this passage. There He invited those who laboured and were heavy laden, which may be understood in a twofold sense: those who were sick of sin and bowed down by a sense of its guilt, and those who laboured to meet the requirements of divine holiness and are cast down by their inability to do so. Those who seek to fulfil the letter of God’s Law, far from finding it “easy,” discover it is very hard; while those who endeavour to work out a righteousness of their own to gain God’s esteem, find it a heavy task and not a “light burden.”

“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Exactly what is the relation between this verse and the ones preceding? To which of the previous clauses is it more immediately connected? We cannot discover that any commentator has made any specific attempt to answer this question. We deem it wise to link these closing words of the Redeemer with each of the earlier utterances. Thus, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest; for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” There is encouragement for us to come and proof that He will give us rest. “Take my yoke upon

you:” you need not fear to do so, “for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” “And learn of me,” for not only am I “meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls,” but “for my yoke is easy.”

“For my yoke is easy.” The Greek word is variously rendered, “good,” “kind,” “gracious.” There is nothing to chafe or hurt, rather is it pleasant to wear. The question has been raised if Christ spoke absolutely or relatively. That is, did He describe what the yoke was in itself, or how that yoke appeared to His people? We believe both senses are included. Assuredly Christ’s yoke or service is a light or gracious one in itself, for all His commandments are framed by infinite wisdom and love and are designed for the good of those who receive them. So far from being a harsh tyrant who imposes hard duties for the mere sake of exerting His authority, Christ is a gracious Master who ever has in mind the welfare and highest interests of His subjects. His commandments “are not grievous” in themselves, but beneficent. The “father of lies” affirms Christ’s yoke to be difficult and heavy.

But not only is the yoke of Christ “easy” in itself, but also it should be so in the sense and apprehension of His people. It will be so, if they do as He bids. The unregenerate find the yoke of Christ irksome and heavy, for it grates against the carnal nature. The service of Christ is drudgery to those in love with the world and who find their delight in fleshly lusts; but to one whose heart has been captivated by Christ, to be under His yoke is pleasant. If we come to Christ daily to be renewed by His grace, to yield ourselves afresh to His rule; if we sit at His feet to be taught of Him the loveliness of meekness and lowliness: if we enjoy spiritual communion with Him and partake of His rest, then whatsoever *He* commands is delightful to us, and we prove for ourselves that “wisdom’s ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace” (Prov. 3:17).

Here the Christian may discover the most conclusive evidence that a good work of grace has begun in his heart. How

many poor souls are deeply distressed over this point. They ask themselves continually, Have I been genuinely converted or am I yet in a state of nature? They keep themselves in needless suspense because they fail to apply the scriptural methods of confirmation. Instead of measuring themselves by the rules in the Word, they await some extraordinary sensation in their heart. But many have been deceived at this point, for Satan can produce happy sensations in the heart and deep impressions on the mind. How much better is the testimony of an enlightened conscience. Judging things by the Word of God, it perceives that the yoke of Christ is easy and light.

But this principle works both ways. If we find by experience that Christ's yoke is easy and His burden is light then what must be said of a vast number of professing Christians who, by their own conduct, often avow that the Lord's service is burdensome? Though members of evangelical churches, may we conclude they are of the class who have a name that they live, and yet are dead (Rev. 3:1)? Certainly we cannot allow that Christ made a false predication of His yoke. Then only one alternative is left. We are obliged to regard as strangers to godliness those who find a life of communion with the Lord and devotedness to His service dull or irksome.

Do not misunderstand this point. We are not affirming the Christian life is nothing but a bed of roses, or that when a person comes to Christ and takes His yoke that his troubles end. Not so. Instead, in a real sense his troubles only then begin. It is written, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). Wearing the yoke of Christ unites us to Him; and union with Him brings us into "fellowship with His sufferings." The members of Christ's body share the experience of their Head. The world hated and persecuted Him, and it hates those who bear His image. But the more closely we walk with Christ, the more we will suffer the hostility of Satan, for his rage is stirred up when he finds he has lost another of his captives.

Not only does the one who truly comes to Christ and takes upon him His yoke evoke the hatred of Satan and of the world, but also he is now the subject of inward conflicts. The corrupt nature which was his at birth is neither removed nor refined when he becomes a Christian. It remains within him, unchanged. But now he is more conscious of its presence and its vileness. Moreover, that evil nature opposes every movement of the holy nature he received at the new birth. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other" (Gal. 5:17). This discovery of the plague of his own heart and that within there is opposition to holy aspirations, is a source of deep anguish to the child of God. He often cries, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24).

We cannot affirm that the Christian's life is one of unclouded sunshine; yet we must not convey the impression the believer's lot is far from being envious, and that he is worse off than the unbeliever. Far from it. If the Christian uses diligently the means of God's appointing, he will possess a peace which passeth all understanding, and experience joys the worldling knows nothing about. The world may frown and the devil rage against him, but an approving conscience, the smile of God, the communion with fellow-believers, and the assurance of eternity with his Beloved, are ample compensation.

What is there in the yoke of Christ which makes such amends for the enmity it evokes and the suffering it entails, so that the believer will attest that it is an easy one? In seeking to answer this question we shall avail our self of the help of John Newton's sermons, in outline. First, those who wear the yoke of Christ act from a principle which makes all things easy. This is love. Any yoke will chafe when resisted, but even one of cast-iron would be pleasant if it were lined with felt and padded with wool. And this is what renders the yoke of Christ easy to His people. It is lined with love, His to them, and theirs to Him. Whenever the shoulder becomes sore, look to the lining! Keep

the lining right and the yoke will be no more a burden to us than wings are to a bird, or a wedding ring to a bride.

Scripture records that when Jacob served a hard master seven years for Rachel, they seemed but a few days to him “for the love he had to her” (Gen. 29:20). What a difference it makes when we perform a difficult task, whether for a stranger or a dear friend, an exacting employer or a close relative. Affection makes the hardest job easy. But there is no love like that which a redeemed sinner bears to Him who died in his stead. We are willing to suffer much to gain the affection of one we highly esteem, even though we are not sure of success; but when we know the affection is reciprocal, it gives added strength for the endeavour. The believer does not love with uncertainty. He knows that Christ loved him before he had any love for the Saviour; yes, loved him even when his own heart was filled with enmity against Him. This love supplies two sweet and effectual motives in service:

A desire to please. This is the question love is ever asking. What can I do to gratify, to make happy the object of my affection? Love is ever ready to do whatever it can, and regrets that it cannot do more. Neither time, difficulties, nor expense concern the one whose heart is warmly engaged. But the world is not in the secret. They neither know nor appreciate the principles which motivate the people of God. Not only are they at a loss to understand why the Christian is no longer willing to join with them in the pleasures of sin, but also they fail to see what satisfaction he finds in reading the Scriptures, in secret prayer, or public worship. They suppose that some mental derangement is responsible, and advise him to leave such gloomy exercises to those on the verge of the grave. But the believer can answer, “the love of Christ constraineth me.”

A pleasant assurance of acceptance. What a difference it makes when we are able to determine whether or not what we do will be favourably received. If we have reason to fear that the one for whom we work does not appreciate our efforts, we

find little delight in the task and are tempted to spare ourselves. But if we have good reason to believe that our labours will meet with a smile of approval, how much easier is the labour and how much more readily will we do it with our might. It is this encouragement which stimulates Christ's disciples. They know that He will not overlook the smallest service in His name or the slightest suffering endured for His sake; for even a cup of cold water given on His account is acknowledged as though proffered immediately to Him (Mark 9:41).

Second, service is still easier and lighter if it is *agreeable to our inclinations*. Esau would probably have done anything to please his father to obtain the blessing. But no commandment could have been more agreeable to him than to be sent for venison, because he was a hunter (Gen. 25:27). The Christian has received from God a new nature, he has been made "a partaker of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4). Just as the magnetic needle ever points to the North Star, so this spiritual principle ever turns to its Author. Consequently, God's Word is its food, communion with Him its desire, His Law its delight. True, he still groans under inward corruption, but these are part of sin's burden and no part of Christ's yoke. He groans because he cannot serve Him better. But just so far as he exercises his faith he rejoices in every part of Christ's yoke. Professing His name is a holy privilege, His precepts are a profitable meditation, and suffering for Christ's sake is counted an high honour.

Third, the burden of Christ is light because sustaining grace is granted to its wearer. Service to a loved one would be impracticable if you were infirm and incapacitated. Nor could you take a long journey to minister to a friend, no matter how dear, if you were crippled. But the yoke of Christ is easy in this respect too—He supplies sufficient strength to the bearer. What is hard to flesh and blood is easy to faith and grace. It is true, apart from Christ the believer "can do nothing" (John 15:5); but it is equally true he "can do all things" through Christ strengthening him (Phil. 4:13). It is true that, "Even the youths

shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall;” yet we are divinely assured “they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint” (Isa. 40:30-31). What more can we ask? It is entirely our own fault if we are not “strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might” (Eph. 6:10).

Whatever the Lord may call upon us to do, if we depend on Him in the use of appointed means, He will most certainly equip us for it. He is no Pharaoh, requiring us to make bricks and providing no straw for the same. So far from it, He promises, “as thy days, so shall thy strength be” (Deut. 33:25). Moses may complain, “I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue,” but the Lord assures him, “I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say” (Ex. 4:10, 12). Paul acknowledged, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves;” yet he at once added, “but our sufficiency is of God” (2 Cor. 3:5). So too whatever sufferings the Lord calls upon His people to endure for His sake, He will assuredly grant sustaining grace. “All power in heaven and in earth” belongs unto Christ and therefore is He able to make our enemies flee before us and deliver from the mouth of the lion. Even though He permits His servants to be beaten and cast into prison, yet songs of praises are put into their mouths (Acts 16:25).

Finally, the easiness of Christ’s yoke appears in *the rich compensations that accompany it*. Under sin’s yoke we spent our strength for what did not satisfy, but when wearing Christ’s yoke we find rest for our souls. If we live a life of pleasing self and seeking our own honour, then we reap misery and woe; but when self is denied and Christ is glorified, peace and joy is ours. No man serves Christ for nothing: in keeping His commandments there is “great reward” (Psa. 19:11)—not of debt, but of grace, after. The Christian may have much to cast him down, but he has far more to cheer him up and send him on

his way rejoicing. He has free access to the throne of grace, precious promises to rest upon, and the consolation of the Holy Spirit to comfort his soul. He has a Friend who sticketh closer than a brother, a loving Father who supplies his every need, and the blessed assurance that when the appointed hour arrives he shall go to another world, where there is no sin or sorrow, but “fullness of joy,” and “pleasures for evermore” (Psa. 16:11).

The Impeccability of Christ

We are living in a world of sin, and the fearful havoc it has wrought is evident on every side. How refreshing, then, to fix our gaze upon One who is immaculately holy, and who passed through this scene unspoiled by its evil. Such was the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate. For thirty-three years He was in immediate contact with sin, yet He was never, to the slightest degree, contaminated. He touched the leper, yet was not defiled, even ceremonially. Just as the rays of the sun shine upon a stagnant pool without being sullied thereby, so Christ was unaffected by the iniquity which surrounded Him. He “did no sin” (1 Pet. 2:22), “in Him is no sin” (1 John 3:5 and contrast 1:8), He “knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21), He was “without sin” (Heb. 4:15). He was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Heb. 7:26).

But not only was Christ sinless, He was impeccable, that is, incapable of sinning.

No attempt to set forth the doctrine of His wondrous and peerless person would be complete, without considering this blessed perfection. Sad indeed is it to behold the widespread ignorance thereon today, and sadder still to hear and read this precious truth denied. The last Adam differed from the first Adam in His impeccability. 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.

The immutability of Christ proves His impeccability, or incapability of sinning:

“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8). Because He was not susceptible to any change, it was impossible for the incarnate Son of God to sin. Herein we behold again His uniqueness. Sinless angels fell, sinless Adam fell: they were but creatures, and creaturehood and mutability are, really, correlative terms. But was not the manhood of Christ created? Yes, but it was never placed on probation, it never had a separate existence. From the very first moment of its conception in the virgin’s womb, the humanity of Christ was taken into union with His Deity; and therefore could not sin.

The omnipotence of Christ proves His impeccability.

That the Lord Jesus, even during the days of His humiliation, was possessed of omnipotence, is clear from many passages of Scripture. “What things so ever He (the Father) doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise....For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth, even so the Son quickeneth whom He will” (John 5:19, 21). When we say that Christ possessed omnipotence during His earthly sojourn, we do not mean that He was so endowed by the Holy Spirit, but that He was essentially, inherently, personally, omnipotent. Now to speak of an omnipotent person yielding to sin, is a contradiction in terms. All temptation to sin must proceed from a created being, and hence it is a finite power; but impossible is it for a finite power to overcome omnipotency.

The constitution of Christ’s person proves His impeccability.

In Him were united (in a manner altogether incomprehensible to created intelligence) the Divine and the human natures. Now “God cannot be tempted with evil” (James 1:13); “it is impossible for God to lie” (Heb. 6:18). And Christ was “God

manifest in flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16); “Immanuel”—God with us (Matt. 1:23). Personality centred not in His humanity. Christ was a Divine person, who had been “made in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:7). Utterly impossible was it, then, for the God-man to sin. To affirm the contrary, is to be guilty of the most awful blasphemy. It is irreverent speculation to discuss what the human nature of Christ might have done if it had been alone. It never was alone; it never had a separate existence; from the first moment of its being it was united to a Divine person.

It is objected to the truth of Christ’s impeccability that it is inconsistent with His temptability. A person who cannot sin, it is argued, cannot be tempted to sin. As well might one reason that because an army cannot be defeated, it cannot be attacked. “Temptability depends upon the constitutional susceptibility, while impeccability depends upon the will. So far as His natural susceptibility, both physical and mental was concerned, Jesus Christ was open to all forms of human temptation, excepting those that spring out of lust, or corruption of nature. But His peccability, or the possibility of being overcome by these temptations, would depend upon the amount of voluntary resistance which He was able to bring to bear against them. Those temptations were very strong, but if the self-determination of His holy will was stronger than they, then they could not induce Him to sin, and He would be impeccable. And yet plainly He would be temptable” (W.G. Shedd, 1889).

Probably there were many reasons why God ordained that His incarnate Son should be tempted by men, by the Devil, by circumstances. One of these was to demonstrate His impeccability. Throw a lighted match into a barrel of gunpowder, and there will be an explosion; throw it into a barrel of water, and the match will be quenched. This, in a very crude way, may be taken to illustrate the difference between Satan’s tempting us and his tempting of the God-man. In us, there is that which is susceptible to his “fiery darts;” but the

Holy One could say, “The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in Me” (John 14:30). The Lord Jesus was exposed to a far more severe testing and trying than the first Adam was, in order to make manifest His mighty power of resistance.

“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, without sin” (Heb. 4:15). “This text teaches that the temptations of Christ were ‘without sin’ in their source and nature, and not merely, as the passage is sometimes explained, that they were ‘without sin’ in their result. The meaning is not, that our Lord was tempted in every respect exactly as fallen man is by inward lust, as well as by other temptations—only He did not outwardly yield to any temptation; but that He was tempted in every way that man is, excepting by that class of temptations that are sinful, because originating in evil and forbidden desire.

“The fact that Christ was almighty and victorious in His resistance does not unfit Him to be an example for imitation to a weak and sorely-tempted believer. Because our Lord overcame His temptations, it does not follow that His conflict and success was an easy one for Him. His victory cost Him tears and blood. ‘His visage was so marred more than any man’ (Isa. 52:14). There was the ‘travail of His soul’ (Isa. 52:14). In the struggle He cried, ‘O My Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from Me’ (Matt. 26:39). Because an army is victorious, it by no means follows that the victory was a cheap one” (W.G.T. Shedd).

One other objection may, perhaps, be noted, though we hesitate to defile these pages by even transcribing the filthy exhalations of the carnal mind. If the humanity of Christ was, because of its union to His Divine person, incapable of sinning, then in view of its being Divinely sustained how could it hunger and thirst, suffer and die? and seeing it did, then why was it incapable of yielding to temptation? It is sufficient answer to this impious question to point out that, while the

Mediator was commissioned to die (John 10:18), He was not commissioned to sin. The human nature of Christ was permitted to function freely and normally: hence it wearied and wept; but to sin is not a normal act of human nature.

To be the Redeemer of His people, Christ must be “mighty to save, travelling in the greatness of His strength” (Isa. 63:1). He must have power to overcome all temptation when it assails His person, in order that He may be able to “succour them that are tempted” (Heb. 2:18). Here then is one of the solid planks in that platform on which the faith of the Christian rests: because the Lord Jesus is Almighty, having absolute power over sin, the feeble and sorely-tried saint may turn to Him in implicit confidence, seeking His efficacious aid. Only He who triumphed over sin, both in life and in death, can save me from my sins.

The sixth of seven booklets.

