

Dr. Jack L. Arnold

Lesson 8
Jesus Christ's Identification with Man in Suffering
Makes Him Superior to Angels
Hebrews 2:16-18

When you think of Christ, do you think of Him as God or man? The tendency among many Christians is to think of Him more as God than man. Yet, Christ was a man and had to be a man if He was to be a Savior, a King, a Prophet and a High Priest.

Christ, as a man, had all the bodily functions and sensations of a man, and He was exposed to all the temptations that any man might confront in his life. Yet, Christ never sinned.

Many think that Christ had an advantage over the average human being when temptations came because Christ had no sin nature. They reason that a sinless person could not be tempted in the same way a human being who is sinful is tempted. Were Christ's temptations real? In what sense was He tested like man? These are questions that the book of Hebrews answers for us.

CHRIST IDENTIFIES WITH MAN'S NATURE (Hebrews 2:16)

“For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the seed of Abraham.” -- In His incarnation, Christ did not take on the nature of angels to save angels, but he did take on the nature of man to save men. The angels that sinned against God were justly condemned to hell.

“And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode. He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6).

“For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment...” (2 Peter 2:4).

God never showed the sinning angels mercy and none of them could ever escape the eternal wrath of God. God spared not the angels who sinned, but He also spared not His Son, Jesus Christ, in order to save sinful men.

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

“He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things” (Rom. 8:32)?

The term “seed of Abraham” is used because the context is about Christ identifying himself with certain men: the elect of God, the redeemed, the believing seed of Abraham. (Gal. 3:16, 29).

CHRIST IDENTIFIES WITH MAN TO HELP HIM WHEN HE SINS (Hebrews 2:17)

“Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God...”-- It was absolutely necessary that Christ should be identified with man that He might be an effective high priest in the service of God. The high priest in the Old Testament represented men before God and Christ could not be the believer’s-high priest unless he was truly a man. Christ is a “merciful” high priest, which speaks of His compassion to relieve the misery of sinners. The high priest in the Old Testament did not have to get involved with people when he made the yearly sacrifice. Christ gave Himself to redeem a people that God might have “many sons.” Christ got involved with people. Christ also is “faithful” in that He never fails to meet our needs as our high priest. He can meet our needs because He was truly a man and He understands what makes a man tick.

“...to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” -- Christ died as Savior to make propitiation for the sins of the people. The word “propitiation” means “mercy seat”. Propitiation means “to satisfy” or “appease”. God is holy and His holy wrath burns hot against sinners. All men incur God’s wrath because they are all sinners and God’s wrath against sinners needs to be appeased or satisfied. Christ died on the cross to appease God’s wrath, but He did not do it for everyone. He makes propitiation only for “the people” who are the elect of God or all those who believe in Christ. Christ died for His people. ***“...and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins”*** (Matt. 1:21). God’s holy wrath will never come down upon those who are true believers in Christ because Christ took the blow of God’s wrath for us. God took out His wrath on Christ for all who will believe that Christ died for them.

Christ, as our propitiator, goes back to the Jewish ritual in the Old Testament. Once a year the high priest would enter into the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle and place blood on the mercy seat to cover or atone for the sins of the people who were true believers within the nation of Israel. This act satisfied God and His wrath did not come on the people. But Christ, who is both the high priest and the sacrifice, propitiated God once and for all and forever when He died on the cross for sin and sinners (Rom. 3:25).

The infinitive “to propitiate” is in the present tense in the Greek and means “to make continual propitiation.” Christ was sacrificed only once and appeased God’s wrath for the true people of God, but there is a continual application of propitiation when the believer sins.

“...but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

“My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world” (1 John 2:1,2).

Christ acts as a defense lawyer before the throne of God. He constantly pleads the blood when a believer sins and this continues to appease the wrath of God.

Imagine a court scene in heaven with God the Father as the judge and Christ as the defense lawyer, when the Father sees a Christian sin. His holy wrath is provoked, but Christ immediately comes to the Christian's defense. He appeals His blood which must satisfy the Father. We cannot be judged because Christ appeals His blood before the Father and His wrath is satisfied or appeased.

CHRIST IDENTIFIES WITH MAN IN HIS TESTS (Hebrews 2:18)

“For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid (help) of those who are tempted (tested).” -- Christ became a man that He might be able to help the redeemed brethren in their trials, tests, weaknesses and infirmities. Jesus Christ was tested at every point just like any man; yet he sinned not. Christ was tempted and tested more than any other person the world has ever known and He did not yield to any of the temptations or break under any of the tests. Christ can help us in our tests because He was tested to the nth degree and yet without sin. It is a picture of a believer who is under heavy testing and he cries out for help in desperation. Christ can help us in our tests because He, too, was tested.

THEOLOGICAL LESSONS

Can a Sinless Person Be Tempted?

Christ had no sin nature and He could not do an act of sin or think an evil thought (1 Pet. 2:22; 2 Cor. 5:21). We know that deity cannot be tempted or tested with evil. ***“Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”, for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt any one”*** (James 1:13). Yet, Christ was both God and man, and while His deity was not able to sin. His humanity was temptable.

Temptations or tests that came to Christ did not come inwardly, but outwardly to His human nature. Remember, temptation or testing to sin is not sin in itself but it is solicitation to, or wooing to, do evil.

A controversy has raged throughout the history of the church over whether a sinless person can be tempted. Was Christ able not to sin or not able to sin? If He was able not to sin, then He must have had the capacity for sin even though He never yielded to sin. The problem with this view is that if Christ has the capacity or potential for sin, then He could have sinned, and this might open the door to a sinful Christ and one who is less than perfect humanity. It is much better to say that Christ was not able to sin. No matter how great the tests. He could not sin, proving that He was truly God come in the flesh, for deity cannot sin.

Years ago, a huge bridge was constructed across a deep canyon to save miles of railway travel. On the day of the dedication of the massive spider web-like bridge, stretching across the gap, hundreds of railway officials, construction engineers, and others were gathered far below, looking up at the impressive work just completed. As the spectators watched with wonder, some doubtful as to whether the bridge would hold the load that would be taken across, two trains were brought from opposite directions and stopped while directly on the bridge. This test was not to

see whether the bridge would hold or not, but to prove it could not break, despite the load which was far greater than any the bridge would ever have to take at any time.

Were the Temptations of Christ Real?

Since Christ never had a sin nature, and since He was not able to sin, and since He never experienced the inner struggle with sin, how can we say His temptations were real? Temptations are just as powerful, regardless of the object being tested. Testings were real to the external flesh of Christ whether He had a sin nature or not. We must remember that Christ was absolute holiness and perfection and so any external contact with the testing of sin brought an intensity or sensitivity to sin not comprehend-able to sinful man. Christ had 100 percent sensibility to sin. External temptations were contacting perfect humanity. Christ never experienced sin, but He was far more sensitive to temptations than the best of sinful men, for He was absolute holiness.

Wescott, in his commentary on Hebrews, says, "Sympathy with the sinner in his trial does not depend upon the experience of sin, but on the experience of the strength of the temptation to sin, which only the sinless can know in its full intensity."

How Can Christ Be Sympathetic Since He Has No Sin Nature?

Christ helps us and sympathizes with us in the intensity of testing. All testing is the same whether it comes from within or without. Whether Christ had a sin nature does not affect the issue. Tests come to all men and all men, sooner or later, fall because all men have a breaking point under the stress and intensity of testing. Some men fall to sin at their breaking point of one percent intensity; others at five or fifteen percent, but all men, sooner or later, fall to testing. But Christ took 100 percent testing and did not yield. Christ is able to help us, not because He knows sin but because He knows the intensity of our testing. Christ bore an infinite weight of testing without sin. Therefore, He can sympathize with us in any degree of suffering we might experience.

How Do the Tests of Christ Relate to the Christian's Tests?

The first misconception that must be cleared up is that Christ is not sympathetic with the sin and the evil a Christian might do, for He hates sin and He died for it. Sin is lawlessness, or disobedience to God's Word (1 John 3:4). Sin is the self-expressing of independence from God, and Christ is never pleased when the Christian sins, and cannot be sympathetic in that situation although He can be forgiving, because He has died for every sin a Christian might commit.

Christ is not sympathetic with our sin, but with our testings. He understands all the testings that might come our way because He has been there before us.

The Bible states clearly that Christ was tested in all points just as a Christian is tested; yet He was without sin.

"Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who

cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things (points, respects) as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:14-15).

Some think that “every point” does not mean every conceivable type of temptation or testing, but that Christ was tempted in the area of the world, the flesh and the devil as men are. Others think it refers to being tested in the area of the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. My own opinion is that every conceivable type of external testing that might come to any man came to Christ in His lifetime and in every case He did not yield to them.

Christ can understand me and sympathize with me in my tests because He has experienced them with greater intensity before me. What a comfort!

CONCLUSION

You without Christ! You have heard that Christ died for the people of God. Christ appeased the wrath of God against sinners through His death for sin at the cross. He did not do this for all men, but He did it for God’s people. God’s people are all those who realize they are sinners and are under the wrath of a holy God. They come to realize their lost condition and their certain destiny of eternal judgment if God does not intervene.

But God’s people also realize that Christ alone can save them and they cling to Him in faith. They flee from the wrath to come and lay hold of Christ and His death for salvation. Have you laid hold? Have you trusted Christ? Turn to the Lord Jesus and you shall know that you are among God’s people.