

**"LIKE UNTO HIS
BRETHREN"**



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By R. D. Brinsmead

In recent years teachings have been coming in among Seventh-day Adventists that would have us believe that the incarnate Christ possessed nothing more than the physical degeneracy of mankind. Except for the decreased size of the physical form, it is being affirmed that Christ's human nature was wholly like that of Adam's before sin entered.

The purpose of this essay is to demonstrate that the logical end of this teaching is the acceptance of the doctrines of the immortality of the soul and Sunday-sacredness.

Weakened Physical, Mental and Moral Powers

The Bible declares: "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise partook of the *same nature* [as the children] . . . Therefore He had to be made like His brethren in every respect." Hebrews 2:14, 17. RSV. In declaring that Jesus had the same nature as the children of men, Paul is not referring to the condition of the heart and mind as in Ephesians 2:3, but he means "flesh and blood"—the whole human organism. The nature of man is threefold—physical, mental, and moral (Testimonies, vol. 5, p. 522). Jesus took the physical, mental, and moral powers of the fallen race.

In our humanity, Christ was to redeem Adam's failure. But when Adam was assailed by the tempter, none of the effects of sin were upon him. He stood in the strength of perfect manhood, possessing the full vigor of mind and body. He was surrounded with the glories of Eden, and was in daily communion with heavenly beings. It was not thus with Jesus when He entered the wilderness to cope with Satan. For four thousand years the race had been decreasing in **physical strength**, in **mental power**, and in **moral worth**; and Christ took upon Him the infirmities of degenerate humanity. Only thus could He rescue man from the lowest depths of his degradation. "The Desire of Ages," p. 117 (emphasis ours) See also "Selected Messages," Book 1, p. 267-8

He who was one with the Father stepped down from the glorious throne in heaven, laid aside His royal robe and crown, and clothed His divinity with humanity, thus bringing Himself to the level of man's feeble faculties. "Review and Herald," Dec. 11, 1888

The Inter-Dependence of the Physical, Mental and Moral Powers

Catholics and Protestants in general admit that Christ's bodily form was not that of Adam's when

he stood in his original perfection. But since they conceive of the soul as a meta-physical, separate entity from the body, they do not consider that these bodily weaknesses had any real bearing on the life of Christ. But the third angel's message has given Adventists a totally different view of the nature of man. We see man as fundamentally a physical organism, with every function of his being operating through the function of a physical body. "The body is the only medium through which the mind and the soul are developed for the upbuilding of character." *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 130. Therefore whatever weakens the physical powers of man will also weaken his mental and moral powers. Instruction upon this point in the Spirit of Prophecy is definite:

Since the mind and soul find expression through the body, both mental and spiritual vigor are in a great degree dependent upon physical strength and activity; whatever promotes physical health, promotes the development of a strong mind and a well-balanced character. "Education," p. 195

Whatever injures the health, not only lessens physical vigor, but tends to weaken the mental and moral powers. "The Ministry of Healing," p. 128.

Mental and moral power is dependent upon physical health. "Review and Herald," Oct. 31, 1871.

Anything that lessens physical strength enfeebles the mind. . . . "Counsels on Diet and Food," p. 48.

. . . Vigor of mind depends largely upon vigor of body. "Testimonies," vol. 7, p. 247.

Between the mind and the body there is a mysterious and wonderful relation. "Testimonies," vol. 3, p. 485.

If Christ took man's degenerate physical powers, He also took the degenerate mental and moral powers of the human organism. If we deny this, we deny the most fundamental truths on the nature of man, and in order to be logical, we would have to accept the "Babylonian" concept of the nature of man—that the condition of the physical powers has no vital relation to the soul of man. If only we had kept before us the great principles upon which the health reform message is based, we could never have become so confused on the nature of Christ as to contend along with Catholics and the Protestant world that Christ possessed only the physical weaknesses of the fallen race.

The Sinlessness of Jesus' Human Nature

The Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy abound in statements affirming the sinlessness of the human nature of Christ. The proponents of the "new-view" of the nature of Christ have done so well in quoting them that there is no need to repeat

them here. We must agree wholeheartedly on the emphasis on the sinlessness of the human nature of Christ—that He had no propensity, inclination or bent to sin. But the statements declaring Christ's sinlessness do not deny that Jesus took man's degenerate faculties. "The mental and moral powers which God has given us do not constitute character. They are talents, which we are to improve, and which, if properly improved, will form a right character." *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 606. The faculties are the "tools" with which man forms his character. Christ did not have the "tools" which Adam had, but He took the inferior "tools" common to all the sons of men.

While Christ took man's weakened mental and moral powers, we do not say that the Master was weak in mental and moral powers. "In Christ, divinity and humanity were combined." *Questions on Doctrine*, p. 649. "Having taken our fallen nature, He showed what it might become, by accepting the ample provision He has made for it, and by becoming partaker of the divine nature." *Ibid.*, p. 657. Christ revealed more than ordinary mental perception, not because the laws of inheritance failed to operate in His birth, but because "His divine nature knew what was in man." *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1124. So too, Christ was strong in moral power, not because His human nature was inherently strong in moral power, but because through surrender and faith He united His weakened human nature to the infinite source of moral power. Christ had to demonstrate that one who is weakest in moral power may overcome in the strength given of God. For this reason, the Spirit led Christ to the wilderness:

For forty days He fasted and prayed. Weak and emaciated from hunger, worn and haggard with mental agony, "His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men." Isa. 52:14. Now was Satan's opportunity. Now he supposed that he could overcome Christ. . . . It was in the time of greatest weakness that Christ was assailed by the fiercest temptations. Thus Satan thought to prevail. By this policy he had gained the victory over men. When strength failed, and the will power weakened, and faith ceased to repose in God, then those who had stood long and valiantly for the right were overcome. "The Desire of Ages," p. 118, 120.

In the wilderness, Jesus demonstrated how even the soul who is weakest in mental and moral power may overcome. For here Jesus Himself was weakened to the point of death. Not only were His physical powers weakened to the uttermost, but He was greatly weakened in mental and moral powers. Whatever weakens physical strength weakens the strength of the mental and moral powers. Christ was haggard with mental agony. When His strength

failed His will power weakened too. Now the Saviour could experience what the weakest mortal must experience when striving against sin and temptation. "Christ's humanity alone could never have endured this test, but His divine power combined with humanity gained in behalf of man an infinite victory." *Review and Herald*, Oct. 13, 1874. Not through the strength of His human will did Christ overcome, but through the *right action* of His weakened human will He overcame. Through surrender He said, "Not My will, but Thy will be done." He linked the weak human will with the divine will, and proved the truth of the following statement: "As the will of man co-operates with the will of God, it becomes omnipotent." *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 333. His victory declares that man may copy the pattern, that he may overcome as Christ overcame. His experience declares that there is not a soul who is so weak in moral power that he cannot find victory through laying hold of the infinite fund of moral power in the divine nature. His example shows that when the weakest human will co-operates with the divine will, it becomes omnipotent.

He met man as man, and testified by His connection with God that divine power was not given to Him in a different way to what it will be given to us . . . "SDA Bible Commentary," vol. 7, p. 925.

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 . . . Jesus, the world's Redeemer, could only keep the commandments of God in the same way that humanity can keep them. "Ibid," p. 929.

Did Christ Take the Sinless Nature of Man?

Not only does the "new-view" deny that Christ was subjected to all our infirmities—for we have much more than mere physical infirmities to contend with—but it proposes that Christ "took sinless human nature," or that He "took the sinless nature of Adam before the Fall." (See *Questions on Doctrine*, p. 650, Heading; *The Ministry*, Sept. 1956, Headings p. 19). Are there statements from Inspiration which support this contention? Indeed there are statements affirming the very opposite:

. . . He took upon Him our sinful nature. "Review and Herald," Dec. 15, 1896.

He took upon His sinless nature our sinful nature. . . . "Medical Ministry," p. 181.

The nature of God, whose law had been transgressed, and the nature of Adam, the transgressor, meet in Jesus. . . . "SDA Bible Commentary," vol. 7, p. 926.

When Christ came to this earth, there was no "sinless human nature" for Him to take. Christ was

made of a woman, and she had no sinless human nature to give to Him. Yet Christ did take a sinless nature, not the sinless human nature of Adam before the Fall, but the sinless nature of His own eternal pre-existence. Through being born of the Holy Spirit, He united this sinless nature to the nature He received from Mary. The result of this union was that Christ's human nature was sinless. We must be careful to notice that Christ's human nature was sinless, not because He took a superior human nature, but because He united the human nature to the divine nature. This means that we may overcome as Christ overcame. He showed us what fallen nature might become when united to the divine nature. "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." 2 Peter 1:4.

Christ's human nature was sinless because that human nature was fully united to the divine nature. In this union is our only hope. This wonderful union cannot be explained, but it may be experienced. When a fallen, sinful man becomes a partaker of the divine nature, he becomes a "new creature" (2 Corinthians 5:17), sinful propensities are cut away from the character (*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 943), "a new moral taste is created," (*Christ our Righteousness*, 1926 Ed., p. 122), and he is given "new motives new tastes, new tendencies." (*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1101). And the more fully a believer partakes of the divine nature, the more fully will he experience the power of the "new creation." Christ was that "new creation" of the Holy Spirit. When the offending nature of man united with the divine nature of the Deity in the person of Jesus, there was a "new creation." Human nature became sanctified and sinless. And only because Jesus chose to be guided by and filled with the Holy Spirit every moment of His life was His human nature sinless. His temptations were the same as ours. Satan appealed to the instincts of self-preservation and self-expression when tempting the Saviour. "Save Thyself" was the basis of every temptation. But moment by moment Jesus "emptied Himself." He chose the cross of self-denial at every step, and did the Father's will. Thus Christ crucified "self"—which is in essence the sinful nature—and the devil found in Him no response to please Himself. Calvary was but the culmination of a whole lifetime of cross bearing for Jesus.

We should not place the obedience and sinless life of Christ by itself as something for which His human nature was peculiarly adapted. To the church awaiting translation is given the promise: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne." Revelation 3:21. We may overcome as Christ overcame. By partaking of the divine nature, every hereditary and cultivated tendency to evil may be cut away from the character (*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 943). By being filled with the Spirit as He was filled with the Spirit, the work of grace may be completed in our natures so that they may be "pure and holy." *Our High Calling*, p. 278. "Jesus revealed no qualities, and exercised no powers, that men may not have through faith in Him. His perfect humanity is that which all His followers may possess, if they will be in subjection to God as He was." *The Desire of Ages*, p. 664. This is the hope of those expecting translation after attaining through the grace of Christ the following experience:

Not even by a thought could our Saviour be brought to yield to the power of temptation. Satan finds in human hearts some point where he can gain a foothold; some sinful desire is cherished, by means of which his temptations assert their power. But Christ declared of Himself, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me." Satan could find nothing in the Son of God that would enable him to gain the victory. He had kept His Father's commandments, and there was no sin in Him that Satan could use to his advantage. This is the condition in which those must be found who shall stand in the time of trouble. "The Great Controversy," p. 623.

Those only who through faith in Christ obey all of God's commandments will reach the condition of sinlessness in which Adam lived before his transgression. They testify to their love of Christ by obeying all His precepts. "SDA Bible Commentary," vol. 6, p. 1118

The transformation of character must take place before His coming. Our natures must be pure and holy. . . . "Our High Calling," p. 278.

While Christ is in the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary, His followers on earth must unite with Him in the full and complete union of divinity and humanity which Jesus knew in His own experience. This is "the marriage" which will be consummated while Jesus is in the most holy place. It is the experience that the 144,000 will enter into by faith.

The Issues at Stake

The nature of man and the law of God will be the points especially controverted in the final battle between truth and error. In the crisis, a larger proportion than we now anticipate will defect from

the third angel's message and accept the doctrines of the immortality of the soul and Sunday-sacredness. (See *Selected Messages*, Book 2, p. 369; *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 463). But what we must realize is that a big step in that direction has already been taken right within the ranks of Adventism.

The Nature of Man: When the Spirit of Prophecy tells us that Christ took "our nature in its deteriorated condition," some of our theologians are telling us that this means only that Christ's physical powers were weakened. But the nature of man is three-fold—physical, mental and moral—and if the physical powers are weakened, the mental and moral powers will be weakened also. To deny this is to deny fundamental truth on the nature of man and take the "Babylonian" position on the nature of man—that the condition of the physical powers has no real effect on the soul. The logical end of this concept is the doctrine of the immortal soul; and the logical end of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is Spiritualism.

The Law of God: Not only do those who take the "new-view" of the Incarnation deny that Christ took man's degenerate mental and moral powers, but they affirm that He took the sinless nature of Adam before the fall. Granted, Christ's human nature was sinless, but this was not due to His taking some superior human nature; rather it was due to His being born of the Holy Spirit, surrendered to the Holy Spirit, guided by the Holy Spirit, and filled with the Holy Spirit through the right action of His will every moment of His earthly life. The difference between these two concepts—that of Christ's taking the sinless nature of man, and that of Christ's having a sinless human nature because the human nature was united to the divine nature—is the difference between life and death. The first concept places the sinlessness of Christ by itself, for none of us partake of the sinless human nature of Adam before the fall. But the second concept places the obedience and sinless life of Christ within the reach of all who will choose to be born of the Holy Spirit, surrendered to the Holy Spirit, guided by the Holy Spirit, and filled with the Holy Spirit even as Jesus was.

Those who teach that Christ took a superior human nature draw the logical conclusion that it is impossible for the rest of mankind to perfectly obey the law of Jehovah in this life. Everywhere today we hear the pronouncements from pen and pulpit that God has not made provision for man to live a sinless life on this earth. Those who accept

this "new-view" of the Incarnation logically take the side of Satan in the great controversy over the law, claiming that God has not made provision for us to perfectly obey it. If God's people accept this delusion, then there will be no third angel's message, no sealing of the saints, no finishing of the mystery of God, no cleansing of the sanctuary, no community of saints prepared to live without a Mediator, no first fruits of the harvest, and no people ready for translation—at least as far as they are concerned.

Did Jesus come to prove that we cannot keep the law of God? Is this what we are supposed to learn from the great truth of the Incarnation? See how this is answered by one of the most explicit declarations found in the Spirit of Prophecy:

Satan represents God's law of love as a law of selfishness. He declares that it is impossible for us to obey its precepts. . . . Jesus was to unveil this deception. As one of us He was to give us an example of obedience. For this He took upon Himself our nature, and passed through our experiences. "In all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren." Heb. 2:17. If we had to bear anything which Jesus did not endure, then upon this point Satan would represent the power of God as insufficient for us. . . . His life testifies that it is possible for us also to obey the law of God. "The Desire of Ages," p. 24.

Three Steps

Ellen G. White saw that God had three steps to the platform of truth (*Early Writings*, p. 258). Satan has three steps down from the platform. The first step is the teaching that Christ took the human nature of man as it was before the fall. This leads to the second step—to the teaching that man cannot find the grace to perfectly obey the law of God in his life. This will inevitably lead to the third step—giving up the Sabbath. This last step must logically follow the original premise, for if it be conceded that we cannot obey *all* the law *all* the time, then there is no point in the Sabbath being a test question. The great argument for the Sabbath is found in James 2:10: "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." But the "new-view" of the Incarnation leads to the conclusion that we cannot really "keep the whole law."

Led by certain prominent theologians, many in our ranks have already taken steps numbers one and two down from the third angel's message. "And he brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the Lord [rejecting the great sanctuary

message], and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east." Ezekiel 8:16. Thus the foundation is already laid for a great landslide into the camp of the Sunday-keepers. This is an indication that the final test on the law of God is right upon the church. Soon the "man with the writer's inkhorn" must "go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof." Ezekiel 9:4.

"Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His." 2 Timothy 2:19. "The church may appear as about to fall, but it does not fall. It remains, while the sinners in Zion will be sifted out—the chaff separated from the precious wheat." *Selected Messages*, Book 2, p. 380.

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