THE FREE-WILL of BOTH GOD & MAN

The Impeccability or Peccability of Christ

THE *FREE-WILL* OF GOD

In considering the volitional state of the *Godhead* we must first acknowledge the ontological uniqueness of deity. There is no one like *God*, nor can any created being be equally compared to Him. *God* is perfectly holy, without sin, and eternally and perpetually so. *God* has never sinned, nor can He sin (*Jam 1:13*). He has never been wrong, never erred, never made a mistake, and there is no flaw in His character. Thus, He is perfect in every way. God is all-loving, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, true, eternal, immutable, holy, just, etc. As the Scriptures declare, "*And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist" (Col 1:17)*. He is *Creator*, *Judge*, the *First Cause*, and the *Author of Salvation*. He is sovereign, meaning He is over all things, wisely governing the universe as the *Ultimate Authority*. He, and He alone, defines right and wrong, sin and holiness. Hence, He is the moral standard whereby all matters of ethics are righteously and justly sustained.

With these things in mind, we can better ascertain the volitional state of God. Obviously, God has a mind, a will, and the ability to make free decisions. The sovereignty of God places God absolutely above all extra-personal coercion or manipulation. For deity then, *free-will* can be defined as '*the power of acting without external constraint or necessity*'. Certainly God, like no other, possesses the ability to act at His own discretion (*Job 23:13; 42:2; Prov 19:21; Eccl 3:13; Isa 43:13*). All divine decisions are made by God freely, none are coerced or manipulated. However, because of God's unique nature—He is *all good* and absolutely *defines moral law*—He only acts in accordance with His holy nature; yet, there is no authority, no causation, greater than He. He is His own authority, answering to no one. He has no external limitations. Granted, He cannot choose *otherwise* than His nature, but this is not because He is not free; none of His choices are externally forced or coerced. Hence, it's safe to conclude that God has free-will. Accordingly, all *freedom,* both moral and volitional, is *only* found in God.

THE *FREE-WILL* OF MAN

God, in His sovereignty, has created two classes of moral beings, namely, *angels* and *men*. Men are created in the image of God (*Gen 1:27*). As such, humans are volitional beings. Both men and angels are considered '*moral-agents*' because they possess attributes capable of attaching moral value to their choices and actions. It's important to note, both *sin* and *holiness, love* and *hate* demand volition (*Rom 14:23; Jam 4:17*). Without choice, there can be no moral culpability for sin. God created man with free-will so man could respond and interact relationally with Him in love. However, with that divinely-ordained ability to *choose Love,* the possibility of *choosing the contrary* (*Evil*) was an inescapable and inverse consequence. Therefore, acknowledging this truth, we understand that God did not create evil. Evil is non-material and is merely a possible outcome of volitional freedom. As *darkness* is simply the absence of *light* and *cold* is the want of *heat*, so *evil* is the moral consequence of men (*or angels*) choosing to reject God and His Word.

Though the doctrine of the *free-will of man* is self-evident, it is not explicitly taught in Scripture, but strongly implied throughout. The fact that God has endowed man with *freedom of choice* is often communicated in the Bible. *Adam* and *Eve* were given the choice to obey or disobey God (*Gen 2: 17; 3:1-6*). The curses and blessings God gave *Moses* to communicate to the *children of Israel* were based on the Jew's free moral-agency,

'*But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee…*' (*Deut 28: 15-20, 45*). The Scriptures urge man to '*choose life*', '*choose*', '*come unto me*', '*open the door*', and '*whosoever will*' (*Deut 30:19*; *Josh 24:15; Matt 11: 28; Rev 3: 20; 22:17*). *Jesus* said to those who faced spiritual ruin, '*…ye would not!*' (*Matt 23: 37*). We also see many examples in the Scriptures revealing men exercising their volition in obeying or disobeying God. For example, the *Psalmist* declared, '*I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me.*' (*Ps 119:30*). *Jesus* said, '*Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her*' (*Lk 10:42*). As the *Apostle Paul* recounted his conversion encounter with *Jesus* on the road to Damascus, he told *Agrippa*, '*Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision*' (*Acts 26:19*). This statement irrefutably confirms *Paul* had the option to obey or disobey *Christ,* even while unconverted on the road to Damascus.

So it is with us; we stand before God as free moral agents. Will we choose to obey or disobey? Yes, the choice is ours, but so are the consequences that follow (*Matt 7:13-14*). As *A.W. Tozer* commented…

"Men are free to decide their own moral choices, but they are also under the necessity to account to God for those choices. That makes them both free, and also bound—for they are bound to come to judgment and give an account of the deeds done in the body." —A.W. Tozer

Granted, though man was created in the image of God, we acknowledge the *human will* has been negatively impacted by both the *fall of man* and *personal sin* and can only be fully recovered via regeneration. Sinners have a certain degree of natural ability, namely, they can externally refrain from any given sin. In other words, they can *choose* to refrain from specific sins—they do not necessarily have to steal, or murder, or become sodomites, etc. However, sinners cannot have right motives (*Ps 53:1-3; Jer 17:9*). Hence, nothing they do, even external conformity to the moral law, is acceptable to God (*Isa 64:6; Matt 19:17; Rom 3:1–12*). Thus, no one, apart from *Christ*, can produce true holiness (*Rom 7:14-20*). *Christ* is God's standard and no one can manifest *Christ* apart from *Christ*. Hence, all must be born-again (*Jn 3:3*). Men are ultimately responsible for their sins because God has provided the means for utter deliverance, namely, *Jesus Christ* and His *Gospel*. In regards to Soteriology, no man can come to repentance and be converted to Christianity apart from *prevenient grace* (*God before man*) or the drawing by *God's Spirit* via the conviction of sin (*Jn 6:44, 16:8; 1 Cor 12:3*). Therefore, the definition of the free-will of man is not that man has the volitional power to actually fully obey God or be reconciled to God apart from God, but rather, that God graciously grants him freedom to choose to either reject or submit to God's merciful influence and grace. This view of human freedom is commonly referred to as the *power of the contrary*. In philosophy this is known as *non-compatibilist freedom* or *libertarian freedom*. In this view, '*free will*' means the capability of doing otherwise. *Jacob Arminius* (1560-1609), in response to *William Perkins*, wrote…

"No one believes, without the exercise of his will. But the actual exercise of the will to believe is a different thing from the ability to will to believe; the latter belongs to all men, the former to the regenerate only, or rather to those enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit. You say that no grace is sufficient for conversion, which is not efficacious. I deny (this), it always remains in the power of the free-will to reject the grace bestowed, and to refuse subsequent grace." —Arminius

Speaking to *Methodist* converts, *John Wesley* discussing conversion stated…

"You know how God wrought in your own soul when he first enabled you to say, 'The life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.' He did not take away your understanding, but enlightened and strengthened it. He did not destroy any of your affections; rather they were more vigorous than before. Least of all did he take away your liberty, your power of choosing good or evil; he did not force you; but being assisted by his grace you...chose the better part." —John Wesley

So, since the *fall*, man's *volitional freedom* is somewhat limited. He is culpable for His actions because: (1) Sin was introduced into humanity through the *fall* but personal bondage to sin is acquired directly through individual sin (*Ezk 18:20; Jn 8:34; Rom 5:12, 6:16*). (2) Neither is he, by necessity, externally forced to specifically violate God's law, though outside of conversion, God's law he will certainly violate (*Eccl 7:20; Rom 3:23*); (3) And lastly, God has provided a *Way (Jn 14:6)*, namely *Jesus Christ* and Him crucified, as an escape from the cycle of sinful bondage (*1 Cor 10:13*). Finally, sinners cannot be converted apart from divine influence, but they do possess the volitional ability to resist and reject divine influence—this summarizes the Biblical view of the *free-will of man.*

THE *FREE-WILL* OF JESUS

As we've asserted above, both God and man have *volitional freedom*. God's *freedom of choice* is intrinsic to His nature, while man's *free-will* is granted by God. So obviously, *Jesus*, the God-man certainly has a *free-will* and it could not be otherwise. As we know, through the *Incarnation*, *Jesus* possesses two natures, one *divine*, the other *human*. Yet, the *will* of *Jesus* remained free after the *Incarnation*. The Scriptures are ripe with examples of *Jesus*' volitional freedom, "…*when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink*" (*Matt 27:34*). "*I will; be thou clean*" (*Matt 8:3*). The liberty of *Christ* was such that He, "…*humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*" (*Phil 2:8*); and, "…*who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame*" (*Heb 12:2*). Such choices are seen demonstrated throughout the *Gospels*.

Only sin hinders and impedes *volitional freedom*, yet both *Jesus' divine nature* and *human nature,* which underscore and animate His *will*, are sinless. This irrefutably proves that *Jesus' will* must logically be *volitionally free.* Furthermore, in *John 6:38 Jesus* declared…

"For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me."

Thus, because the *person* of *Jesus* is immutable (*Heb 13:8*), His *human nature* has always perfectly submitted to His *divine nature* (*Jn 5:19, 8:29*). His *human nature* intrinsically shadows His *divine nature,* which essentially protects, shields, and leads His *humanity*; this cannot change. All His choices are sheltered from any external influence, yet remain all His own. Therefore, He is free volitionally because His unwavering and uninterrupted submission to His *Father's will* is His defining *act of volition*. He has freely, without external coercion or manipulation, chosen to say and act only in accordance with His *Father*. Because of His governing choice to absolutely submit to the *Father*, He can only choose, say or do what God can choose, say, or do, and again, because He is immutable, this cannot change.

"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good." —Isaiah 7:14-15

This passage in *Isaiah* prophesies of the *Incarnation*, using the term '*Immanuel*', or '*God is with us*'. The basic principle expressed is clear—*to choose the best and the good is preliminary, precursor, and equivalent to refusing the evil.* To *taste* (*Ps 34:8, 119:103-104; 1 Pet 2:3*) or *eat* (*choose*) *butter* and *honey* (*the good, the best, the opposite of evil, God Himself*) represents *Jesus'* eternal, immutable choice to submit *His will* to the *Father's will*, which in turn, morally insulated Him from doing anything but eternally *refusing all evil.* Consequently, the spiritual application points to this defining volitional choice of the *Son of God* addressed above. All *Jesus* could do was *refuse evil* because of His eternal choice of always submitting *His will* to His *Father's will.* His volitional freedom is found here. He forever set the moral stage of victory in this eternal choice. His *will* is free, His choice of perfect submission to the *Father* was settled in eternity-past and immutably continues into eternity-future, making anything but the choice to *refuse all evil* impossible. He could no more sin than a redeemed man, who

by grace, perpetually *walks in the Spirit* and *abides in the Lord Jesus Christ* (*Gal 5:16; 1 Jn 3:6, 9-10*). So, before *Satan* ever offered one solicitation to the sinless God-man, His *will* was firmly and eternally set in His *Father's will*. Thus, His moral posture, like His *Father*, was always in utter resistance to every suggestion to disobey. Again, there are no external manipulations or pressures forcing *Jesus* to submit His *will* to the *Father's will*. Consequently, *Jesus* the God-man, has absolute volitional freedom.

This also verifies that *Jesus* did not overcome *sin* by relying on His *deity*, but rather, he triumphed in temptation in His humanity by His absolute yielding and dependency on the *Father's* grace. His will submitted to the Father's will.

SEEING GOD HAS *FREE-WILL*, IS IT POSSIBLE HE SIN?

The Scriptures are abundantly clear— God, "*will not lie nor repent: for He is not a man, that he should repent"* (*1 Sam 15:29*). "*As for God, his way is perfect*" (*Ps 18:30*). "*There is no unrighteousness in him*" (*Ps 92:15*). "*God cannot lie"* (*Tit 1:4*). "*It's impossible For God to lie*" (*Heb 6:18*). He is not "*a man that He should lie"* (*Num 23:19*), and "*He cannot be tempted with evil"* (*Jam 1:13*). God is above *temptation* because there is nothing internally in God lower than all-goodness that might be susceptible to evil and nothing externally that can possibly exert greater influence than His own holy character. Also, God is both *immutable* and *perfect*. These divine characteristics express the absolute completeness of God's holy nature. He, in essence, cannot change nor has He any need for change, it would violate His nature. Consequently, *divine perfection* and *divine immutability* are attributes inconsistent with the possibility of God committing sin. Therefore, the Scriptures irrefutably, unquestionably teach sin is not possible for God. As we pointed out above, God is the ultimate moral standard. *Moral law* is merely the transcript of God's holy character. All righteousness is utterly defined by *who* and *what* He is. Hence, it's beyond the bounds of possibility for God to *lie* not merely because He is *holy,* but even if God *theoretically* told a lie, it would immediately become the *truth. The option to sin is not intrinsically part of the lofty realm of deity because whatever deity chooses and does can only be defined as holy*. This is because God absolutely and exclusively frames the very concept of holiness. God's person, unlike human personality, is in such perfect harmony with His immutable nature, His choices cannot be anything but in accordance with His holy nature. Therefore, what God chooses and what He does cannot be anything but *perfect righteousness*. Unlike man, God's nature absolutely defines His choices and actions. The question is then settled, God cannot sin and yet, He is volitionally free.

SEEING JESUS HAS *FREE-WILL*, WAS IT POSSIBLE HE SIN?

This is a very difficult question. The idea in theology that teaches it was possible for *Jesus* to sin is referred to as *Peccability (able to not sin)*. The opposite view, that *Jesus* could not have sinned, is called, *Impeccability (not able to sin)*. All historic traditions of the Church affirm, as the Scriptures teach, that *Jesus* did not sin (*Jn 8:46; 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 Jn 3:5*). However, was it possible?

The issue is sourced in the mystery of the hypostatic union, the *divine* and *human* natures of *Christ* coupled together via *Incarnation* as one indivisible *Person*. Much of the debate on the *impeccability* side is motivated from a legitimate desire to avoid tainting *Christ* with sin. Much of the debate on the *Peccability* side is the legitimate desire to affirm the true *humanity of Christ* (*for a fuller explanation*).

Those who defend *impeccability* assert that *Christ* was fully God and possessed no *sinful nature*, therefore given His deity, He was incapable of sinning. Those who defend *peccability* often cite *Hebrews 4:15* and argue that though *Jesus* never sinned, true temptation must present the possibility of yielding. If *Jesus* could not have yielded to temptation, then He could not have been tempted in like manner as men.

The implications of this debate are far-reaching, impacting doctrines as varied as the *deity of Christ*, *free-will*, *sanctification*, the *origins of evil*, etc. The concerns, from both sides of the argument, '*Could Jesus have sinned?*', are all valid. Admittedly though, much of the debate is theological conjecture as the Scriptures, for the most part, are silent on these doctrinal nuances. However, the five points below are relevant Scriptural certainties…

1. *Jesus* was tempted in all points (*Heb 4:15*).
2. *Jesus* never sinned (*Heb 4:15*).
3. *Jesus* is immutable (*Heb 13:8*)
4. *Jesus'* complete redemptive work, including His associated moral choices, were foretold (*Mk 9:12*).
5. *God's Word* is true, eternal, and immutable (*Ps 119:60, 119:89; Jn 17:17;*).

These points are Scriptural absolutes, they are not open for debate. We may seek to understand. We may reason and question *how*? Yet, we dare not question *if*? We must not fail to confidently believe the declarations of holy writ. Human reasoning, philosophy, and speculation must all bow the knee to Scripture. So, how do these five Scriptural absolutes relate to the *Impeccability* or *Peccability* debate*:*

1. *Jesus* was tempted in all points.

"For 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…" —Hebrews 4:15a

This verse authoritatively states that *Jesus,* in His *humanity* was tempted, '*in all points like as we are*', sufficiently qualifying Him as our *Redeemer*. Does valid *temptation* demand the possibility to yield? It's important to point out, that *temptation* does not absolutely necessitate *susceptibility*; only *successful temptation* demands *susceptibility*. Nonetheless, whether temptation demands the *possibility of failure* or the *temptation of Jesus* is something beyond our comprehension may be open for discussion, but not whether He was *tempted.* Neither should we question whether that *temptation* was valid. Again, not having all the information, our human reasoning may struggle to understand. We may wonder, '*If there is no possibility of falling, can temptation be really temptation?*' Indeed, we may wonder *how*? However, we must not question what the Scriptures plainly teach. Whether we understand *how Jesus* could actually be tempted if it was impossible for Him to sin, really doesn't matter. According to the Bible, He *was*. Which simply proves believing *Jesus* was *Impeccable* doesn't violate the Biblical testimony.

2. *Jesus* never sinned.

"...yet without sin." —Hebrews 4:15b

The eternal *Word of God* declares that *Jesus* was tempted, but never yielded to sin. Thus, it's impractical to speculate on what Christ's human-will might have decided/chosen if it were operating independently of His divine nature; such a situation never arose. Yet, we must remember, what the Scriptures declare, whether we agree or comprehend, is divinely inspired. It is our *highest authority*, meaning all contrary thoughts, reasoning, speculation, etc. must absolutely yield to its claims. The Scriptures are also eternal and cannot be untrue (*Isa 40:8; Jn 10:35; 1 Pet 1:25*). This means the *Word of God* was absolutely true 100 billions years in eternity-past. Likewise, the *Word of God* will continue to be absolutely true 100 billion years into the future. Consider for a moment the ramifications of *Jesus* actually sinning. If *Jesus* sinned, that would render both the Scriptures untrue and make God a liar. Is this possible? Not according to the Scriptures themselves, as *Jesus* declared, '*…the scripture cannot be broken*' (*Jn 10:35*) and *Hebrews 6:18* teaches, '*…it was impossible for God to lie*'. When *Peter* took up his sword to resist the mob sent from the chief priests and elders to apprehend *Jesus* in the Garden, *Jesus* pointed outs…

"Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" —Matthew 26:52-54

It would logically appear that these Scriptural absolutes deal an utter theological death-blow to the possibility of *Jesus* ever sinning or resisting the Father's will.

3. *Jesus* is immutable.

"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever." —Hebrews 13:8

This is very, very important. As we've already established, the Scriptures teach elsewhere that God is immutable (*Ps 15:4, 102:26-27; Mal 3:6; Jam 1:17*). Yet, *Hebrews 13:8* doesn't merely declare *deity*, or *Jesus' divine nature* as '*the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever*', but the very person *Jesus*. It's important to note, *natures* do not make choices or act, *persons* do. Granted, the person of *Jesus* can only be defined as including both His *divine* and *human natures,* nevertheless, His *Person* cannot change. Because of the mystery of the hypostatic union in the *Incarnation*, *Jesus' human nature* and His *divine nature* are distinct, yet they're also coupled. Seeing the *person* of *Jesus* is '*the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever*', if it was ever possible for Him to *sin*, that would mean it would always be possible for Him to sin. This is an unthinkable prospect. Moreover, as we've already established, *Jesus' will* has always, immutably so, been submitted to the *Father's will*. This submission, as mentioned above, is the defining volitional choice of the *Son*. It eliminates the possibility of choosing to *sin* as *sin* is contrary to *God's will*. This parallels the believer's impossibility to sin as long as the believer, by faith, abides in *Christ*, though conditional (*1 Jn 3:6, 9-10*). This leaves absolutely no philosophical possibility for the essence of *Jesus* to *change* and, in my mind, rules out the *Peccability of Christ*. There can be no possibility of *Jesus* committing sin.

4. *Jesus'* redemptive work, including His relevant choices, were foretold.

"And he answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things; and how it is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things, and be set at nought." —Mark 9:12

An attribute of God is *omniscience*, which means He knows all things, including future events and the future choices of all free-moral agents. This knowledge is referred to as *exhaustive foreknowledge*. Though God's foreknowledge is *certain*, it is not *necessary*. In other words, the future choices God *knows* will certainly come to pass and those choices cannot be otherwise, but this knowledge doesn't violate volitional freedom because His *knowledge* is based on the *choice*, rather than the *choice* on His *knowledge* (*see a fuller explanation*). In other words, knowledge of an outcome is not the cause of that outcome; *knowledge* doesn't equal *causation*. So, the fact that something is foreknown by God makes it *certain*, but it does not make it *necessary*. God, who transcends time, knows what we will freely choose in time.

For example, if God judiciously shared His foreknowledge about my salvation choices freely exercised in *February 1987*, with men 100 years before in 1887, those men could *know* for certain I would be born-again. When considering this information, someone may ask them, "*Is it possible for Britt Williams not be converted to Christianity in 1987?*", to which they could confidently reply, "*No, it's not possible. According to God's revealed foreknowledge to us, he will be born-again in February of 1987 and it cannot be otherwise!*" To which the questioner might wonder, "*So, will He have a choice?*", to which they could boldly answer, "*Of course, he has a choice, God's knowledge of his choice is not the cause of his choice!*". Likewise, God's exhaustive foreknowledge is selectively used in the inspiration of Scripture. Though God knows everything, very little of this knowledge is revealed in the

Bible. However, both in the *Old Testament* and *New Testament Gospels*, foreknowledge of *Jesus'* successful redemptive work is revealed. Remember, the *Word of God* is eternal, simply meaning it has always existed, even before the Scriptures were inspired and revealed to men. This makes the redemptive work of *Christ* and the choices He made in accomplishing and fulfilling that work, including living sinless, *certain*, but not *necessary*.

5. *God's Word* is eternal, immutable, and true.

"For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven." —Psalms 119:89

According to the *Scriptures*, who testify of themselves, the *Word of God* is eternal (*Ps 119:89; Matt 24:35; 1 Pet 1:25*), *immutable* (Eccl 3:14-15; *Isa 46:9-10; Tit 1:2; Heb 6:17-18),* and *true* (*Ps 119:160; Jn 17:17, 10:35*). As we know, *Jesus,* the eternal *Son of God*, the *Logos*, is both the *living Word* and the *written Word* (*Jn 1:1; Rev 19:13*). *Jesus* and the *Word of God* are synonymous and cannot be separated or divorced from one another. What is true of one is true of the other. The Scriptures declare…

"…for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." —Revelation 19:10

Thus, '*It is written*' (*Mk 9:12*) is equivalent to '*I Am*" (*Jn 8:58*). What the *Bible* declares, and specifically what it declares about *Jesus,* is *eternal* (*at all times, from eternity past to eternity future*), *immutable* (*cannot change, impossible to be otherwise*), and *true* (*the impossibility of being erroneous*). As *Jesus* is the *same yesterday, and to day, and for ever,* likewise the *Word of God* is *for ever, settled in heaven* (*Heb 13:8; Ps 119:89*)*;* which simply means the *finality* and *certainty* of the *Scriptures* were irrevocably established in eternity-past, long before the ink of the quill dried on the parchment.

As *Christians*, our *Epistemology* must be limited to divine revelation. Our only objective standard for determining truth is the *divine revelation* of *God's Word*. Thus, we cannot know anything for certain except what we obtain via *divine revelation*, or the *Word of God*. Moreover, as *Christians*, two of the primary presuppositions of our faith are, (1) we can discern *God's words* (*Jn 10:27*) and (2) we consider those *words* to be infallible and inerrant. As the *Psalmist* declared, "*Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way*" (*Ps 119:128*). We do not judge *God's Word*, *God's Word* judges us. Both our *Epistemology* and our *Presuppositions* play an important role in how we approach Bible interpretation. If these two fundamental principles of interpretation are ignored, our hermeneutics will be faulty. In formulating *doctrine* or *dogma* we are essentially making *theological knowledge claims*. *What is written* must always take precedent over *philosophy*, *human reasoning*, and *theological conjecture*; the *explicit* must trump the *implicit*. Hence, whatever *theological knowledge claims* we assert must be consistent with *divine revelation* or they must be considered either *erroneous* or mere *theological speculation*. These are important dynamics to remember in arriving at a sound conclusion regarding *Impeccability* or *Peccability*.

The *Impeccability* or *Peccability* controversy primarily arises from the universal difficulty in explaining and understanding the *Incarnation*. *Easton's Bible Dictionary* describes the *Incarnation* as…

"That act of grace whereby Christ took our human nature into union with his Divine Person, became man. Christ is both God and man. Human attributes and actions are predicated of him, and he of whom they are predicated is God. A Divine Person was united to a human nature (Acts 20:28; Rom. 8:32; 1 Cor. 2:8; Heb. 2:11-14; 1 Tim. 3:16; Gal. 4:4, etc.). The union is hypostatical, i.e., is personal; the two natures are not mixed or confounded, and it is perpetual." —Easton's Bible Dictionary

When "*the Word was made flesh*" (*Jn 1:14*), *Jesus* did not become two people, but He became one *Person* with two distinct natures, a fully *divine nature* and a fully *human nature*. Many wonder how this event did not

undermine the *Immutability* of the *Second Person* of the *Godhead*? First, because the addition of the taking on of *human nature* was neither a *subtraction from* or an *alteration* of the divine essence of the *Logos*. Consider the definition of the *Incarnation* held by the traditional Christian church since the 4th century…

"The one and the same Christ is to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ." —from the Chalcedonian Creed

Hence, the precise dynamics of the *Incarnation* protects the *divine essence* from corruption but also the *human nature* from deification. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, the *Incarnation* does not violate *Jesus'* immutability because the overarching eternal existence of the *Son of God*, the *Logos*, the *Word of God*, is consistent with His stated eternal nature in the Scriptures. His *Incarnation*, His *earthly ministry* and all it entailed, His *death*, *burial*, and *resurrection* were all intrinsic to the *Word of God* throughout eternity, both past, present, and forever, into the future. In other words, because the *Incarnation* was foretold in Scripture and the *Word of God* and *Jesus* are synonymous, *Incarnation* was not really something new, or foreign, but something that had always been in the full-scope of the nature of the *Son of God*.

Thus, the *Son of God* was unchanged as He entered a union with *sinless humanity* (*Heb 10:5*). As to *Jesus' deity*, it is unchanging; in His *human nature*, He is changeable. As God, *Jesus* is immutable, infinite and ever-supreme in every way. But as to His *human nature*, He is able to change, subject to weakness, able to suffer, able to die, etc. He is simultaneously divine and human, infinitely strong and suffering weakness, immortal and mortal. He is the God-man. The *Incarnation* means that *Jesus* can simultaneously lay claim to both His *divine nature* and His *human nature*.

So, in the hypostatic union there is a relationship of the two distinct natures in *Christ*: *divinity* and *humanity*. Each nature fully retains its own properties; they are not changed, or blended together. So, while we understand that God fully knows all things (*Ps 139; 1 Ki 8:39; 1 Jn 3:20*), when we come to a passage such as, "*But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father*" (*Mk 13:32),* we can safely say:

1. In His *humanity*, *Christ* was limited in His knowledge.
2. However, in his *divinity*, simultaneously *Jesus* knew the day and the hour.

Granted, the coupled natures, *human* and *divine*, juxtaposed *with*, rather than *against*, one another, presents an on-going, inescapable tension that tends to violate our finite reason. This philosophical tension runs through the very fabric of the *doctrine of the Incarnation*. Unfortunately, it also tends to rear its familiar head in all doctrinal considerations surrounding the *Incarnation*, including *Impeccability*.

Since, *Impeccability* centers around the two natures of *Christ* and the limitations of both, let's consider what we know. As we mentioned, in *Scripture*, we are given indications on when Christ's *human nature* was at play. With this in mind, let's briefly contrast the two natures of *Christ* and their respective activities. For example, it's obvious *deity* cannot be *hungry*, *tired*, *learn*, *lack knowledge*, be *limited in location*, be *tempted*, *bleed*, *die*, or *sin*. Yet, the Bible clearly teaches *Jesus* experienced *hunger* (*Lk 4:2*), got *tired* (*Mk 4:38*), *learned* (*Heb 5:8*), *lacked knowledge* (*Mk 13:32*), was *limited in location* (*Matt 2:1*), was *tempted* (*Heb 4:15*), *bled* (*Acts 20:28*), and *died* (*Jn 19:30*). Therefore, all these actions must be attributed to *Jesus'* human nature and none apparently interfered with the *Immutability* or *Deity* of *Christ* or *God* would have ceased being *God*. Nonetheless, there is one thing in our, '*deity cannot do list*' above that *Jesus* did not do, and that's *sin*. Remember, *exhaustive foreknowledge* is irrefutably

certain. God's plan for fallen man's redemption, the gift of *eternal life*, would've failed if *Jesus* sinned, but that was not possible…

"Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began…" —Titus 1:1-2

From eternity past, the *Scriptures* proclaim *Jesus,* in His humanity, would be *hungry*, *tired*, *learn*, *lack knowledge*, be *limited in location*, be *tempted*, *bleed*, and *die*. However, the *Word of God* also foretells that *Jesus* existed in eternity past as *sinless*, was born *sinless*, lived *sinless*, and died *sinless*. It could not, at any time, be otherwise. This point is closely related to arguments #2 and #4 above, but more specifically warns us in regard to our hermeneutical methodology. Because the *doctrine of the Incarnation* can be so difficult, if our hermeneutics are Scriptural and God-glorifying, the only limitations on *Jesus' deity* we should allow in our doctrine are limits the Scriptures themselves reveal took place. Moreover, it's clear these limitations did not violate His *deity* because he remained God and finished His atoning work on the cross. He couldn't sin, because *God's Word* is eternally true, infallible, perfect, and immutable. He couldn't sin because, '*It is written*' and '*I Am*' are eternally inseparable (*Jn 1:1*) and He cannot deny Himself (*2 Tim 2:13*).

In the *Incarnation*, the underlining doctrine that cultivates the need to consider *Impeccability*, we already have a theological paradox. Is it any wonder, whatever side of the *Impeccability* vs. *Peccability* we ultimately decide on, we'll not escape some unexplainable issue that violates our finite reason?

My conclusion? *Jesus* is *Impeccable*. He could not sin, He cannot sin, and He absolutely could not do otherwise, but He still had/has *volitional freedom*.

—B.W.

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