

IT'S TIME SOMEONE FINALLY TOLD YOU THE TRUTH ABOUT...

The Human Nature of Christ

"We dare not reject truth merely because we cannot understand or explain it." – Kenneth H. Wood

1) Introduction

- a) Why our understanding of the nature of Christ is important –
 - i) We are saved by faith, or belief. We live by faith. We overcome by faith. What is the opposite of faith? Unbelief, or doubt. Faith is always strong when things are going well, when our emotions are on a high, when we "feel" spiritual. We feel like we can conquer the world. However, when we begin to question and doubt, it becomes impossible for faith to achieve the victory. Unless we are clear on Christ's humanity, we will not have the faith to face and endure the final crisis.

All need a knowledge for themselves of the position and work of their great High Priest. Otherwise it will be impossible for them to exercise the faith which is essential at this time or to occupy the position which God designs them to fill. – *Great Controversy*, p. 488.

He who has not sufficient faith in Christ to believe that he can keep him from sinning, has not the faith that will give him an entrance into the kingdom of God. – *Review & Herald*, March 10, 1904 par. 26.

- b) I almost can't believe I'm doing this, and for two completely different reasons.
 - i) The first is that this subject has fueled unceasing debate in the church, and it's usually best not to fuel debate.
 - ii) The second is that the discussion is long overdue.
- c) I learned what I will share on this subject largely from the writings of A.T. Jones and E.J. Waggoner, and later a more extensive study of the Bible and the writings of Ellen White (which both Jones and Waggoner employed in their presentations). It was one of the most exciting and hope-filled subjects to me as a new Christian.

- d) That Jesus took human nature is agreed upon by all within the church. The debate is over whether he took the nature of Adam/humanity before the fall (prelapsarian or pre-fall), the nature of Adam/humanity after the fall (postlapsarian or post-fall), or a hybrid of the two, where he took the human weaknesses of the nature (he got hungry and tired) without the sinful urges of the nature.
- e) From my early experience, it was as clear as the noonday sun that Jesus took my nature – my humanity, with all its liabilities – and yet did not sin, even in a thought, and He did all this so that I could be restored to His image and likeness. As I said, this gave me great hope, and was one of my favorite themes. As my experience progressed, I began to meet with opposition – no, opposition is too narrow a word – marginalization, condescension and name-calling would be a better description. I found myself gradually adopting a sort of hybrid view of Christ's human nature, not because it made the most sense, but because it drew the least fire. I can see that more clearly in retrospect now, but didn't realize it when it was happening.
- f) While this has always been a subject I have been careful not to be overly dogmatic about, simply because we're dealing with something the Bible calls the mystery of godliness, I still feel it is a subject which demands our attention and study. I will share two statements that emphasize these points –

If Christ is all and in all to every one of us, why are not His incarnation and His atoning sacrifice dwelt upon more in the churches?... This will be the employment of the powers of the redeemed through the ceaseless ages of eternity. – *Selected Messages*, Vol. 3, p. 187.

The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden chain that binds our souls to Christ, and through Christ to God. ***This is to be our study.*** Christ was a real man; He gave proof of His humility in becoming a man. Yet He was God in the flesh. When we approach this subject, we would do well to heed the words spoken by Christ to Moses at the burning bush, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Ex. 3:5). We should come to this study with the humility of a learner, with a contrite heart. And the study of the incarnation of Christ is *a fruitful field*, which will *repay the searcher* who digs deep for hidden truth. – *Selected Messages*, Vol. 1, p. 244.

2) Some History

a) Jones and Waggoner

- i) This was part and parcel of both Jones' and Waggoner's Christology. They both held the view that Christ took man's fallen nature. This was the (unofficial) position of the church through at least the 1930s.
- ii) I will share just one statement in reference to the message of Jones and Waggoner, written by Ellen White in May of 1895, nearly 7 years after Minneapolis.

The Lord in His great mercy sent a most precious message to His people through Elders Waggoner and Jones. This message was to bring more prominently before the world the uplifted Saviour, the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. It presented justification through faith in the Surety; it invited the people to receive the righteousness of Christ, which is made manifest in obedience to all the commandments of God. Many had lost sight of Jesus. They needed to have their eyes directed to His divine person, His merits, and His changeless love for the human family. All power is given into His hands, that He may dispense rich gifts unto men, imparting the priceless gift of His own righteousness to the helpless human agent. This is the message that God commanded to be given to the world. It is the third angel's message, which is to be proclaimed with a loud voice, and attended with the outpouring of His Spirit in a large measure. – *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 91-92.

b) The Baker Letter

- i) A turning point in Adventist thinking was the discovery of the "Baker letter". In 1895, Ellen White wrote a letter to a minister named L. H. Baker. Of the 19 handwritten pages, 2 entire pages were devoted to counsels on the public presentation of the nature of Christ. This was a private letter that did not find its way into any of the Testimonies for the Church, and did not surface until 1955. Here is a portion of that letter –

Be careful, exceedingly careful as to how you dwell upon the human nature of Christ. Do not set Him before the people as a man with the propensities of sin. He is the second Adam. The first Adam was created a pure, sinless being, without a taint of sin upon him; he was in the image of God. He could fall, and he did fall through transgressing. Because of sin his posterity was born with inherent propensities of disobedience. But Jesus Christ was the only begotten Son of God. He took upon Himself human nature, and was tempted in all points as human nature is tempted. He could have sinned; He could have fallen, but not for one moment was there in Him an evil propensity.... Bro. Baker, avoid every question in relation to the humanity of Christ which is liable to be misunderstood. Truth lies close to the track of presumption. In treating upon the humanity of Christ, you need to guard strenuously every assertion, lest your words be taken to mean more than they

imply, and thus you lose or dim the clear perceptions of His humanity as combined with divinity.... Never, in any way, leave the slightest impression upon human minds that a taint of, or inclination to, corruption rested upon Christ, or that He in any way yielded to corruption. He was tempted in all points like as man is tempted, yet He is called "that holy thing." **It is a mystery that is left unexplained to mortals that Christ could be tempted in all points like as we are, and yet be without sin. *The incarnation of Christ has ever been, and will ever remain a mystery.*** That which is revealed, is for us and for our children, but let every human being be warned from the ground of making Christ altogether human, such an one as ourselves; for it cannot be.... The Baker Letter, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 13, pp. 18-19

ii) This letter has been used again and again to discourage the study or discussion of the nature of Christ. The irony is that in the very same year this letter was written, A. T. Jones spoke on the nature of Christ for 5 of his 26 presentations at the 1895 GC session. There is no record, public or private, in which Jones received counsel remotely resembling that which was sent to Baker. Rather, we find the following statement regarding Jones in a letter written to Dr. & Mrs. Kress, July 27, 1906 –

A. T. Jones has a theory of the truth, as expressed in his books. He does not repudiate these, but he virtually goes back upon their teachings, by the course of action he is following. – *Paulson Collection*, p. 331.

iii) It is extremely unlikely that Ellen White would counsel an unknown evangelist on the public teaching of Christ's humanity and say nothing to Jones who at the very same time was addressing the world church on the topic.

c) W. W. Prescott

i) Prescott was a young minister who underwent a reconversion experience as a result of the message of righteousness by faith in 1888. He became a strong supporter and promoter of the new emphasis in the years following, and a sought-after camp meeting speaker. One such camp meeting was the Armadale Campmeeting in Melbourne, Australia in 1895. In his Oct. 31 presentation entitled "The Word Became Flesh," he said

(1) "So you see that what the Scripture states very plainly is that Jesus Christ had exactly the same flesh that we bear,—flesh of sin, flesh in which we sin, flesh, however, in which He did not sin, but He bore our sins in that flesh of sin. Do not set this point aside. No matter how you may have looked at it in the past, look at it now as it is in the word;

and the more you look at it in that way, the more reason you will have to thank God that it is so. – *The Bible Echo*, Jan. 6 & 13, 1896.

- ii) Ellen White was present at the Armadale Camp Meeting, and wrote about Prescott's presentations in these words –

We are at this time in our camp-meeting having a feast of precious things. The word is presented in a most powerful manner. The Holy Spirit has been poured out upon Brother Prescott in a great measure.... Brother Prescott has been bearing the burning words of truth such as I have heard from some in 1844. The inspiration of the Spirit of God has been upon him. Unbelievers say, "These are the words of God. I never heard such things before." We have had the truth presented in clear lines. Bro. Prescott has never had such power in preaching the truth as he has had since coming to this meeting. The unbelievers sit with their eyes riveted on him in amazement, as the truth comes forth from his lips, vitalized by the Spirit of God. When I consider the responsibility resting upon all who hear this heaven sent message, I tremble at the word of the Lord. Who will receive the message sent to them? – Letter 25, Nov. 6, 1895 to S. N. Haskell (unreleased).

3) Ellen White

- a) Ellen White is crystal clear that Jesus did not take the nature of Adam before his fall. Just a few statements will establish this –

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.... 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... – *Desire of Ages*, p. 117.

It would have been an almost infinite humiliation for the Son of God to take man's nature, even when Adam stood in his innocence in Eden. But Jesus accepted humanity when the race had been weakened by four thousand years of sin. Like every child of Adam He accepted the results of the working of the great law of heredity. What these results were is shown in the history of His earthly ancestors. He came with such a heredity to share our sorrows and temptations, and to give us the example of a sinless life. – *Ibid.*, p. 48.

Notwithstanding that the sins of a guilty world were laid upon Christ, notwithstanding the humiliation of taking upon Himself our fallen nature, the voice from heaven [at Christ's baptism] declared Him to be the Son of the Eternal. – *Ibid.*, p. 112.

The Son of God... took upon Him our sinful nature. Clothing His divinity with humanity, that He might associate with fallen humanity, He sought to regain for man that which by

disobedience Adam had lost, for himself and for the world... – *Signs of the Times*, July 30, 1902.

Think of Christ's humiliation. He took upon Himself fallen, suffering human nature, degraded and defiled by sin. He took our sorrows, bearing our grief and shame. He endured all the temptations wherewith man is beset. He united humanity with divinity: a divine spirit dwelt in a temple of flesh. He united Himself with the temple. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us," because by so doing He could associate with the sinful, sorrowing sons and daughters of Adam. – *Youth's Instructor*, Dec. 20, 1900.

Letters have been coming in to me, affirming that Christ could not have had the same nature as man, for if He had, He would have fallen under similar temptations. If He did not have man's nature, He could not be our example. If He was not a partaker of our nature, He could not have been tempted as man has been. If it were not possible for Him to yield to temptation, He could not be our helper. It was a solemn reality that Christ came to fight the battles as man, in man's behalf. His temptation and victory tell us that humanity must copy the Pattern; man must become a partaker of the divine nature. – *Selected Messages*, vol. 1, p. 408.

Christ did not make believe take human nature; He did verily take it. He did in reality possess human nature. "As the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same" (Hebrews 2:14). He was the son of Mary; He was of the seed of David according to human descent. He is declared to be a man, even the Man Christ Jesus. – *Ibid.*, p. 247.

Letters have been coming in to me, affirming that Christ could not have had the same nature as man, for if He had, He would have fallen under similar temptations. If He did not have man's nature, He could not be our example. If He was not a partaker of our nature, He could not have been tempted as man has been. If it were not possible for Him to yield to temptation, He could not be our helper. It was a solemn reality that Christ came to fight the battles as man, in man's behalf. His temptation and victory tell us that humanity must copy the Pattern; man must become a partaker of the divine nature. – *Ibid.*, p. 408.

He was a mighty petitioner, not possessing the passions of our human, fallen natures, but compassed with like infirmities, tempted in all points like as we are. Jesus endured agony which required help and support from His Father. – *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 508.

Christ took our human nature, fallen but not corrupt, and would not be corrupted unless He received the words of Satan in the place of the words of God. – Manuscript 57, 1890 (unreleased), as quoted in J. Zurcher, *Touched With Our Feelings*, p. 242.

4) The Word became Flesh (Jn. 1:14)

a) The Bible is clear that Jesus took our humanity. The question is “What kind of humanity was it?” I would say a question to precede that question would be “Why did He take human nature?” The Bible gives the answer –

i) “For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted” (Heb. 2:18).

(1) This is why the apostle makes the point “He does not give aid to angels...” (v. 16). In other words, Jesus took human nature to relate to human nature; to sympathize with the temptations of human nature; and to give aid to human nature. So what kind of human nature did He come to aid – unfallen, or fallen? What sense would it make for Jesus to take a nature that the people He took that nature to help didn't have? Why bother taking human nature at all?

(2) This is also why the apostle uses such emphatic language – “He Himself likewise...”

ii) Speaking of the greatness of Christ's condescension, Ellen White wrote –

Christ is the ladder that Jacob saw, the base resting on the earth, and the topmost round reaching to the gate of heaven, to the very threshold of glory. If that ladder had failed by a single step of reaching the earth, we should have been lost. But Christ reaches us where we are. He took our nature and overcame, that we through taking His nature might overcome. – *Desire of Ages*, p. 311.

b) The spirit of antichrist (1 Jn. 4:1-2)

i) One of the tests of the Spirit is regarding whether or not Jesus Christ has come “in the flesh.” The spirit of antichrist is said to teach that Christ has not come in the flesh. Many today interpret this test as referring to whether or not Jesus came in human nature. However, the power that the Bible identifies as antichrist *does not deny* this.

ii) What they have denied is that Jesus has come in fallen flesh. This has given birth (no pun intended) to the doctrine of the immaculate conception, in which Mary assumed a sinless nature so as to pass this nature on to Christ. This was in a large part what both Jones and Waggoner were trying to contrast in their own presentations on the nature of Christ.

5) Overcoming “as Christ overcame” (Rev. 3:21)

- a) How could we overcome as He overcame if He didn't overcome as we have to overcome?
- b) Tempted in all points, yet **without sin** (Heb. 4:15)
 - i) Every man is tempted when enticed by his desires (Jas. 1:13-15)
 - ii) There is no temptation that is not common to man (1 Cor. 10:13)
 - iii) If Jesus was tempted in every point like we are, then He had to have desires that tempted Him that He didn't yield to even in a thought.

"The prince of this world cometh," said Jesus, "and hath nothing in Me." John 14:30. There was in Him nothing that responded to Satan's sophistry. He did not consent to sin. Not even by a thought did He yield to temptation. So it may be with us. – *Desire of Ages*, p. 123.

- c) Christ exercised no power that we can't

[Jesus] came to the world to display the glory of God, that man might be uplifted by its restoring power... 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. – *Ibid.*, p. 664.

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. Therefore Jesus was "in all points tempted like as we are" (Hebrews 4:15). He endured every trial to which we are subject. And He exercised in His own behalf no power that is not freely offered to us... His life testifies that it is possible for us also to obey the law of God. – *Lift Him Up*, p. 83.

Bear in mind that Christ's overcoming and obedience is that of a true human being. In our conclusions, we make many mistakes because of our erroneous views of the human nature of our Lord. 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. His imputed grace and power He gives to all who receive Him by faith. The obedience of Christ to His Father was the same obedience that is required of man. Man cannot overcome Satan's temptations without divine power to combine with His instrumentality. So with Jesus Christ, He could lay hold of divine power. He came not to our world to give the obedience of a lesser God to a greater, but as a man to obey God's Holy Law, and in this way He is our example. – *Selected Messages*, vol. 3, pp. 139-140.

The Lord Jesus came to our world, not to reveal what a God could do, but what a man could do, through faith in God's power to help in every emergency. Man is, through faith, to be a partaker in the divine nature, and to overcome every temptation wherewith he is

beset. The Lord now demands that every son and daughter of Adam through faith in Jesus Christ, serve Him in [the] human nature which we now have. – *Ibid.*

Add texts, statements about Jesus trust in His Father, doing nothing of Himself

- d) What about Ellen White’s statements about Christ’s perfect hatred of sin, and His nature recoiling from sin?

Amid impurity, Christ maintained His purity. Satan could not stain or corrupt it. His character revealed a perfect hatred for sin. – *Signs of the Times*, May 10, 1899.

He is a brother in our infirmities, "in all points tempted like as we are;" but as the sinless one His nature recoiled from evil. – *Steps to Christ*, p. 93.

- e) Sinful propensities

- i) The hybrid view of the human nature of Christ takes the position that Jesus only inherited the weaknesses of the human physical constitution – the “innocent infirmities” such as hunger, pain, weakness, sorrow and death, but no “tendency to sin” or “sinful propensities.” This is due, at least in part, to Ellen White’s letter to Baker, in which she said

Not for one moment was there in Him an evil propensity... *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 447.

- ii) It is important to note, however, that Ellen White differentiated between “inherent propensities” and “evil propensity.” “Inherent propensities” become “evil propensities” only after yielding to temptation. Ellen White wrote

Do not set Him before the people as a man with the propensities *of sin*. He is the second Adam. The first Adam was created a pure, sinless being, without a taint of sin upon him... Because of sin, his posterity was born with *inherent propensities of disobedience*. But Jesus Christ was the only begotten Son of God. He took upon Himself human nature... Not for one moment was there in Him an *evil propensity*. – *Ibid.*

- iii) Further, while she affirms that Jesus had never had “evil propensities,” she also wrote that He had to

“...meet and be subjected to all the evil tendencies to which man is heir...” - MS 303, 1903 (Unpublished).

- iv) I believe William Hyde summed up this point well when he wrote “although burdened by the weakness of fallen humanity, Jesus never

allowed the tendencies and propensities of the human race to become evil propensities. He never permitted a human weakness to become a personal sin. Although He was tempted with sin, He never participated in sin, He never developed evil or sinful propensities.” – *Ministry*, February 1972.

6) The Flesh and the Mind

- a) The Bible speaks of the relation between “the flesh” and “the mind”
 - i) The desires of the flesh and of the mind (Eph. 2:3)
 - ii) The carnal mind (Rom. 8:7) vs. the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16; Phil. 2:5)
 - iii) “In me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells... With the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin” (Rom. 7:18, 25).
- b) The flesh does not refer to the body itself, but to what Ellen White referred to as the “lower passions,” the natural desires of the body. These are contrasted with the “higher powers” of reason and morality. Consider the following statements –

The lower passions have their seat in the body and work through it. The words "flesh" or "fleshly" or "carnal lusts" embrace the lower, corrupt nature; the flesh *of itself cannot act contrary* to the will of God. We are commanded to crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts. How shall we do it? Shall we inflict pain on the body? No; but put to death the temptation to sin. The corrupt thought is to be expelled. Every thought is to be brought into captivity to Jesus Christ. All animal propensities are to be subjected to the higher powers of the soul. – *Adventist Home*, p. 127.

I have been instructed that flesh food has a tendency to animalize the nature, to rob men and women of that love and sympathy which they should feel for everyone, and to give the lower passions control over the higher powers of the being. If meat eating was ever healthful, it is not safe now. – *Child Guidance*, p. 382.

Some will acknowledge the evil of sinful indulgences, yet will excuse themselves by saying that they cannot overcome their passions... Why is this weakness? It is because the animal propensities have been **strengthened by exercise** until they have **gained the ascendancy over the higher powers**. Men and women lack principle. They are dying spiritually because they have so long pampered their natural appetites that their power of self-government seems gone. The lower passions of their nature have taken the reins, and that which should be the governing power has become the servant of corrupt passion. – *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 348.

7) Born “Born Again”

- a) “A body Thou has prepared for Me... I delight to do Thy will...” (Ps. 40:6-8 w/ Heb. 10:5-7).
 - i) The human nature of Christ was not identical with the unregenerate sinner; his nature was common only with those who have experienced a spiritual rebirth. This isn’t to say that Jesus needed the new birth; he was pure, sinless, and undefiled. When we use the term “born born again” with reference to Jesus, we do it in a adapted sense for lack of a better expression.
 - ii) Jesus came with the same lower passions that we have (less propensities developed by yielding to temptation), but with His “higher powers” in control. This is the “mind of Christ.” When we accept Christ and receive the new birth, we receive the mind of Christ and are able, by the power of Christ, to once again place reason over passion – to overcome as Christ overcame. We are crucified with Christ, and Christ now lives in us (Gal. 2:20).

He has made it possible for them to perfect Christian character through His name, and to overcome on their own account as He overcame in their behalf. He has given them an example in His own life, showing them how they may overcome. "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." – *Bible Echo*, September 19, 1898 par. 2.

Satan declared that it was impossible for the sons and daughters of Adam to keep the law of God, and thus charged upon God a lack of wisdom and love. If they could not keep the law, then there was fault with the Lawgiver... Jesus humbled himself, clothing his divinity with humanity, in order that he might stand as the head and representative of the human family, and by both precept and example condemn sin in the flesh, and give the lie to Satan's charges. He was subjected to the fiercest temptations that human nature can know, yet he sinned not; for sin is the transgression of the law. By faith he laid hold upon divinity, even as humanity may lay hold upon infinite power through him. Although tempted upon all points even as men are tempted, he sinned not. He did not surrender his allegiance to God, as did Adam. – *Signs of the Times*, January 16, 1896.

8) Tempted in All Points

- a) The Bible speaks of 3 points of temptation – “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 Jn. 2:16). It was in these points that Jesus was tempted to the utmost and overcame. In other words, His temptations did not have to be identical to be “in all points as we are”.

b) Christ's supreme temptation was to rely upon self, i.e., His own divine nature.

i) It was as difficult for Christ not to depend upon his divine nature (self) as it is for us not to depend on our human nature (self).

It was a difficult task for the Prince of Life to carry out the plan which He had undertaken for the salvation of man, in clothing His divinity with humanity. He had received honor in the heavenly courts and was familiar with absolute power. It was as difficult for Him to keep the level of humanity as for men to rise above the low level of their depraved natures and be partakers of the divine nature. – *Confrontation*, p. 85.

ii) Keeping His glory veiled was a severe trial to Christ.

To keep His glory veiled as the child of a fallen race, this was the most severe discipline to which the Prince of life could subject Himself. Thus He measured His strength with Satan. He who had been expelled from heaven fought desperately for the mastery over the One of whom in the courts above he had been jealous. What a battle was this! No language is adequate to describe it. But in the near future it will be understood by those who have overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony (Letter 19, 1901). – *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1081.

iii) It was a great temptation at times for Christ to flash forth His divine power.

Christ suffered keenly under abuse and insult. At the hands of the beings whom He had created, and for whom He was making an infinite sacrifice, He received every indignity. And He suffered in proportion to the perfection of His holiness and His hatred of sin. His trial by men who acted as fiends was to Him a perpetual sacrifice. To be surrounded by human beings under the control of Satan was revolting to Him. And He knew that in a moment, by the flashing forth of His divine power, He could lay His cruel tormentors in the dust. This made the trial the harder to bear. – *Desire of Ages*, p. 700.

Finally, though Christ did not share in like passions or evil propensities, these were laid upon Him on the cross, as he experienced the full measure of the guilt of every sinner.