

Is it possible for Christ to have sinned?

(and did He possess the holy spirit from conception?)

By C M White
Version 1.2

**“For because He Himself has suffered when tempted,
He is able to help those who are being tempted.”**

(Heb 2:18)

**“For I have come down from heaven, not to do my
own will but the will of Him who sent me.”**

(John 6:38)

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Note: *English Standard Version* (ESV) used throughout unless otherwise indicated.

Associated studies

- *Binitarian/Ditheistic Monotheism and the Exalted Christ in Church of God doctrine*
- *God's Glory and Man's Destiny*

Introduction

The question of whether Christ could sin or not is one that has perplexed theologians and Christians in general for centuries. Theologians have struggled with this issue in debates, articles and books for a very long time.

The argument was that if Christ was God in the flesh, how could he sin? Or that He willed Himself with the aid of the holy spirit not to sin but to pursue holiness (Rom 7:12) and God's will for Him (Heb 3:1-6; John 4:34). As such, He could state

"I will no longer talk much with you, **for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me,**
but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here." (John 14:30-31)

Another idea was that He was so well guarded by the angels and His mind filled with the holy spirit, it was next to impossible for Him to have sinned.

The two points of view are known as the *impeccability* of Christ (ie His inability to sin) and the other the *peccability* of Christ (He was able to sin, but never did).

This debate entered the Church of God and from time-to-time you would hear it discussed and later during the early 1990s period it was raised as a strong possibility that He could not sin.

Which is the correct position?

In response to what was being promoted in the Church of God in the early 1990s, I assembled my thoughts and the pertinent Scriptures into a Bible study in 1991 with the same title as this document. Note: this is a Bible study, not a paper or article.

The Revelations of Scripture

A basic Scripture to consider for this debate is Heb 4:15

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one **who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.**" (Heb 4:15)

The Greek word for tempted is *peirazo* which derives from *peira* "to pierce through" or "to test", not to put under a simple test, but immense stress. Christ felt the strain and suffered through the temptations – and as such knows how we feel.

The power and intensity of the temptations must have been incredible and we would never have experienced anything like it – making our salvation ever more remarkable. To have Divinity undertake such a task and apparently a risk, demonstrating that His love for humans evidently knows no bounds.

He never became sinful, even though He came into close proximity to humanity and was surrounded by spiritual and physical forces representing evil.

We should notice the following from this:

1. why would He be tempted unless Satan knew that He could sin?
2. why does Paul write “yet without sin” if He could not sin?

Further, if God decided to make it impossible for Him to have sinned, then why did He lead Christ into the wilderness to resist Satan’s temptations (Matt 4:1-11)? Why did Satan bother tempting Him if he knew that Christ could not sin – for surely he would have been aware of this, given years of observation and attempts to end His life.

Yet Christ is meant to be an example to Christians of a life of struggle, advancement and perseverance. If He could not sin, He did not suffer and could not become the pioneer of our salvation:

“But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, **should make the founder [= pioneer, trailblazer or captain] of their salvation perfect through suffering.**” (Heb 2:9-10)

The suffering Christ endured was not only the crucifixion, but His entire life of struggle with the self, Satan, society, false allegations and such like. In other words He suffered like we do – but in a far greater way than we could imagine.

His sacrifice for us is incomprehensible and something to be eternally grateful for.

“By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that **Jesus Christ has come in the flesh** is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.” (1 John 4:2-3)

“For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. **By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh** and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” (Rom 8:3-4)

So, Christ, in human form and feelings, was flesh. He was 100% flesh but apparently a spark of God life within Him to be able to be sacrificed as divine to enable all sins to be covered. In that sense He was both God and man.

“For because **he himself has suffered when tempted**, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” (Heb 2:18)

It must be admitted by all sides that His temptations must have been completely unique and vastly beyond what we were capable of. In addition, one should ask if there was any likelihood that He possessed any predisposition to any weaknesses, similar to us with our inherited human nature? After all, He was born of Mary and thus would have inherited both strengths and weaknesses.

It is evident from the above and other Scriptures that He felt the full force of temptation from Satan and his demons, the world and any inherited weaknesses. This means that He has acquired the maximum empathy for sinners who are tempted.

Did Christ possess the holy spirit from conception?

Delving into whether Christ possessed the holy spirit since conception, let us assemble together the various Scriptures that would reveal an answer.

Around age 29 or 30 He was baptised:

“In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and **the Spirit descending on him like a dove**.

And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”” (Mark 1:9-11)

“And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw **the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him;**

and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”” (Matt 3:16-17)

“And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

“**The Spirit of the Lord is upon me**, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”” (Luke 4:17-19)

“As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all),
you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed:
how **God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power**. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.” (Acts 10:36-38)

None of the above Scriptures state that Christ received the holy spirit for the first time at baptism. Indeed, He was anointed as a King is or a prophet is to commence a Work. But that does not mean He did not possess the holy spirit before that instance.

Perhaps this is a similar principle in play here comparative to John 20:22 vs Acts 1:2-9. Ten disciples were involved at the John 20 event (with the exception of Thomas): “And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.””

Perhaps Christ was giving them a sampling or introduction of the spirit, but not the full amount needed to resist Satan and to undertake an evangelising work. His breathing on them seems to have been a promise for what was to come on Pentecost.

Let us now turn to something interesting said about John the Baptist, prior to his birth and later encounter with Christ:

“But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, **and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb**. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”” (Luke 1:13-17)

So if John the Baptist possessed the holy spirit since conception, how much more important for Christ to have, given His mission and need of spiritual insights and abilities.

We cannot be 100% sure, but it seems to be that because the Father, via the spirit, impregnated an ovum within Mary, it follows that Christ had the holy spirit from conception. Thus – Christ was sired by the Father in that sense and at that moment Christ was both Divine and human.

So, He possessed the holy spirit, at least in some measure, in His mind. Or rather continuing some Divinity from His previous glorious existence. It reflected in human form His previously enjoyed glory.

Notice:

“But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for **that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit**.

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and **they shall call his name Immanuel**” (which means, **God with us**).” (Matt 1:20-23. Cp. Luke 1:30-35 and see Matt 2:11; 14:33; Heb 1:6)

As the *Pulpit Commentary* regarding Matt 1:20 states:

“but, under the true circumstances, to urge him to take Mary, that so the promise might be fully carried out in his family and no other. Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife (ver. 15, note). For that which if conceived in her (“borun,” Wicliffe; quod natum est, Vulgate); “**Gr. begotten**” (**Revised Version margin**), for γεννηθέν generally refers to the father rather than the mother (yet see Matthew 11:11), and here lays special stress on the Divine origin. Is of the Holy Ghost. “Of Spirit (not flesh), and that the Holy Spirit (ἐκ Πνεύματος ἑστίν Ἁγίου)” (ver. 18, note).” [emphasis mine]

Struggling with Satan and the world during his life with the holy spirit only **with** Him rather than **in** His mind from birth until baptism, seems unlikely. In fact, if He was conceived by the holy spirit, how would that mean that the holy spirit was not part of Him? It was in place of the human sperm, so He must have continued to possess some Godship to be “God with us” from birth.

In other words, even in His human flesh, he never succumbed to any sin that intervened with – or contaminated His continuing, unbroken Divine nature from His pre-existence.

“And the child grew and **became strong in spirit**, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.” (Luke 1:80)

“And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers ...
And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.

And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.” (Luke 2:37, 39-40) (KJV)

The Greek for *spirit* in both Luke 1:80 and 2:40 is *pneuma*. *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance* states:

“G4151

πνεῦμα

pneuma

pn̄yoo'-mah

From G4154; a *current* of air, that is, *breath* (*blast*) or a *breeze*; by analogy or figuratively a *spirit*, that is, (human) the rational *soul*, (by implication) *vital principle*, mental *disposition*, etc., or (**superhuman**) an **angel, daemon, or (divine) God, Christ's spirit, the Holy spirit**: - ghost, life, spirit (-ual, -ually), mind. Compare G5590.”

[emphasis mine]

This indicates the likelihood that Christ had the holy spirit to some extent, since conception, as He continued His Godship, though in a human body with human weaknesses. Yet He was never sinful!

“Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.” (Is 53:1-5)

Christ did no wrong (I Pet 2:21-22) and yet He bore our sins (vv. 23-24). How is this possible unless it was possible for Him to have sinned?

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,

but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” (Phil 2:5-8)

So we can see that He was made flesh (Heb 2:14-16) and was devoid of power and glory of His pre-existence (Matt 17:5; Phil 2:5-9) and did not know everything (Matt 24:36; Mark 13:32). Yet His Scriptural knowledge was rather incredible due to His studying, contemplating and putting Scripture into practice (Luke 2:47) and yet even He had to increase or advance “in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man” (v. 52).

He had “emptied Himself” – that is divested Himself – laid aside - His glory and power for humanity.

He was even lower than the angels for a while (Heb 2:9-10):

“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,
and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.
For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham.” (Heb 2:14-16)

“For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh”
(Rom 8:3)

That is because He needed to go through similar human struggles as we do as He progressed through life. Like all of us, He had to grow mentally and physically and go through the same sorts of joys and tears, temptations and spiritual triumphs like all of us do (Luke 2:40).

But, because He was tempted and tested beyond what we go through, even from youth, He probably would have needed to have had the holy spirit in His mind (even if in measure) prior to His baptism and ministry. And even angelic protection.

After His baptism He seemed to have even more of the spirit and Divine power (Luke 5:17).

Similar to those men mentioned below, we receive the spirit at God’s timing – normally at baptism. But because Christ had so much knowledge and wisdom and was sinless from early on in His youth, it seems that He had it from conception.

In contrast, we have it given to us at some point in our lives dwelling with us but not joining with us until baptism. But He needed it much more than we do given what he went through.

Notice what some Scriptures reveal:

“Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, because the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.” (1 Sam 3:7)

This would have been done via the spirit. How like us. And how is the word of the Lord revealed to us today? Via the holy spirit. Did not Christ know God from His earliest awareness during His youth? That can only come from the spirit of God.

“He was speaking about the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were later to receive. For the Spirit had not yet been given [to them], because Jesus had not yet been glorified.” (John 7:39)

“On their arrival, they prayed for them to receive the Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.” (Acts 8:15-16)

“Then I remembered the word of the Lord, as He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'” (Acts 11:16)

So, normally, the spirit is not granted until baptism, but that was different for Christ as He continued His previous God life and the need for strength to resist temptations from the earliest age, much more than we.

As we have seen, John the Baptist possessed the spirit from the beginning (Luke 1:15), so I ask ‘why not Christ?’ Surely He must have had an even greater measure than John because He was sinless and John was not? How can one be sinless without the indwelling of the holy spirit for mental will and exertion are not enough. And more than that, without the spirit of God indwelling, our efforts may not be completely acceptable to God. Our righteousness with our own efforts are not enough – we must have the indwelling of the holy spirit directly linking us to God, to be acceptable to Him.

Do we have to be told in God’s Word that He had the spirit from conception? Is it not logical for Christ to be Divine from the outset and that He has continued being Divine – continued His Divinity unbroken – even if in partial measure because we know that He gave up His eternal state for us (Phil 2:5-9) - but that does not mean that he didn’t have the spirit from conception.

As Divine, He can then experience humanness in the flesh. As our Creator, He died for us and as such, His shed blood (being Divine) cleanses us and everyone that repents from Adam until the end.

So, although the Bible does not specifically state that Christ possessed the spirit from conception, I think that logic and deductive reasoning (as with so much doctrinal understanding) leads me to that outcome (2Tim 1:7; 2:15).

Old Church of God teaching

Herbert W Armstrong wrote in *The Incredible Human Potential* (ch 6):

“But now notice verse 14: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." This, of course, is speaking of Jesus Christ. In the human flesh, He was begotten of God the Father, the only one ever so begotten (before human birth).

At the time of this begetting and human birth "the Word" became the Son of God ...

Can you visualize God and with Him the Word (also God — of the God FAMILY) planning this supreme feat of their creative power? The Word volunteered to give up temporarily the supreme POWER and GLORY He had possessed always (John 17:5), to divest Himself of all that, to be begotten by God, born in human flesh for the purpose of death (Heb 2:9). **Since God delegated the actual MAKING of man to the Word, He, when physically born as a human being, for the purpose of death, would, in that death, be giving a life of greater value than the sum total of ALL HUMAN LIVES — since He was their MAKER. And, being DIVINE as well as human — being God as well as man, He in the person of Christ, would be able to avoid sinning.** Then He, who NEVER sinned, although tempted in all points just like the rest of us humans, in death could PAY in our stead THE PENALTY WE HAVE INCURRED.

By creating MAN out of physical matter, being mortal, man could DIE. So man's penalty for sin was DEATH. ("For the wages of sin is DEATH; but the GIFT of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" — Rom 6:23)

God the Father would have power to resurrect Christ to immortal life from the dead — thus making a resurrection to immortal Spirit-composed life possible for humans." (pp. 63, 67)

It is interesting that Mr Armstrong stated that Christ could "avoid sinning", he did not write that Christ was not able to sin.

In 1955 he published an article "Millions do not know what Christ really was!" which was reprinted in a brochure around 1980 titled *Is Jesus God?* In it he asserted:

"In living a perfect life, in doing great miracles, Jesus did not have any special help from God the Father that we cannot have" (p. 4).

Consider how true this is. God provides assistance in measure to our spirituality; needs; His mercy; and whether He knows that there is a certain trial that is required for one to overcome and grow spiritually and how much you can take. And if we earnestly ask first.

Christ had certain advantages over us and this would have been according to His needs and duties He was performing. This may have included:

- angelic assistance where needed
- a memory of His former life/Godship is assumed
- superior mind and not like us (Ps 50:21)
- He could forgive sins toward God and other (Mark 2:10). We can only forgive sins toward others
- Miraculous healings (Matt 8:14-17)

- Performed miracles such as raising the dead (John 11:38-44); created food (Matt 14:17-21; John 2:1-11); walked on water (Matt 14:22-33) and the evil spirits were subject to Him (Luke 11:20)
- Even angels could be at His disposal (Matt 26:53)
- He can grant eternal life (John 10:27-28)

This means that He continued His Godship, though in limited form and/or was granted these additional powers by the Father, as required. One might add that proving His Divinity, He was also worshipped while still in human form (John 9:38; Matt 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 5:25; 20:20; 28:17; Mark 5:6; John 20:28).

“Millions are being taught, in one form or another, this deception of Satan the Devil! Some believe that Jesus had a “special” kind of blood in His veins -not containing *human nature* with all its weaknesses. Then there is the belief that *denies* the fact that Jesus inherited *human nature* from His mother, Mary. This theory thwarts the meaning of the many scriptures showing that Christ Jesus came as the son of *man* inheriting His hu-man nature from a human mother ...

... the doctrine of Anti-Christ is this: It is an attempt to deny the fact that a normal man – with human nature – could, with the help of God’s Holy Spirit ... live in perfect obedience to the Law of God as Jesus Christ did ...

The idea Satan is trying to put across is that it is *impossible* for man to keep the spiritual law of God, and so Jesus came as our Saviour – not “in the flesh” with normal human nature – but through some “special process” so that He could keep the law of God in our stead! And therefore we don’t have to keep the Spiritual Law ...

But it wasn’t easy! Jesus had exactly the same day-to-day battle with sin that we do”.
(pp. 5, 6). [emphasis mine]

What is the human nature which Mr Armstrong refers? One might outline this nature as follows:

- That which comes naturally (natural instincts)
- Inherited characteristics from forefathers (both positive and negative; strong and weak)
- Satan’s/demonic influences or impulses that penetrate our minds, leading us to sinful thoughts and actions.

Christ had to resist the above in similitude to us so that He can identify with us and as result help us in our difficult walk toward the Kingdom (Heb. 2:9-10, 17-18).

Conclusions

From the above we can deduce that it was possible for Him to have sinned even though He was God in the flesh. His brain was also flesh but He possessed the holy spirit within the human mind.

As He was 100% human but with the likelihood historical memory of God-ship (as memories gradually came back to Him and as angels appeared to Him over time) and the holy spirit inserted into His brain to

work with that which is mind - with its consciousness/awareness and capacities. Yet, He was composed of flesh and not of spirit. He therefore possessed impulses, emotions, a nervous system, inherited traits and such like in common with all humans.

Even though He was tempted to sin by Satan, He resisted with the power of God and became an example for all of us, showing us the route we can take to become like Him and God.

Yet none of us can come even vaguely close to Christ's pureness and holiness. We can try and no doubt we can all do better. But our eternal gratitude is extended to God the Father for pitying us and being merciful toward us, forgiving our iniquities and eventually granting us eternal life.

Some sins are voluntary and pre-meditated; some are spontaneous thoughts that rise up from memory or inherited traits; some can happen quickly without a thought.

Paul indicates this in Romans:

"For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.

For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.

So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.

For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,

but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin." (Rom 7:14-25)

Forgiving us and helping us toward complete salvation can only be accomplished if Christ's shed blood completely decontaminates us each day. Washing through us so that we are acceptable to God so that we are accepted as sinless.

Becoming divine just as He is Divine. For that is the ultimate purpose of Christ's visitation to the earth in human form – to enable humans to become divine.

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