

The Sinlessness of Jesus: Did Jesus Have to Be Without Sin?

THE New Testament teaches time and again that Jesus was entirely free from sin (Jn 8:46; 2Co 5:21; Heb 4:15; 7:26; 1Pe 2:22; 1Jn 3:5), Jesus' moral nature was unaffected by Adam's fall, as was Adam's prior to his sin. Jesus loved God's law and kept it perfectly. He loved the Lord "with all [his] heart and with all [his] soul and with all [his] strength" (Dt 6:5).

Jesus had to be sinless for a number of important reasons. First, Jesus' sinlessness was necessary so that on the cross he could be a worthy substitute for sinners. Had he not been "a lamb without blemish or defect," his blood would not have been "precious" (1Pe 1:19) in the eyes of God. In that case, Jesus would have needed a savior himself, and his death could not have redeemed us from eternal judgment. His perfection qualified him to be our atoning sacrifice.

Second, by living an utterly perfect life in active conformity to God's law, Jesus earned the right to sit on David's throne forever (Pss 89; 132; Mt 1:1). In this way, Jesus secures our salvation as he reigns over all on our behalf.

Third, the active righteousness of Christ actually makes believers righteous before God. Not only are believers forgiven of their sins through Christ's atonement, but they actually become the righteousness of God (2Co 5:21) because Christ's own righteousness is reckoned to their account through faith in him. When believers are in Christ, God the Father looks on them as he looks upon sinless Jesus.

Fourth, Jesus faced and overcame temptation to become our sympathetic high priest before the Father in the heavenly places. He was "tempted in every way, just as we are," though he was without sin (Heb 4:15). This means that every type of temptation that we face also assailed him; but he yielded to none of them. Even through the agony of Gethsemane and the cross, he successfully resisted temptation (Mt 26:36ff.; Mk 14:32ff.). Jesus' sinlessness in the face of temptation formed him into our perfectly sympathetic high priest and secured his right to represent us permanently before the Father (Heb 5:9-10; 7:25-8:13).

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