

That They May Be One

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As I read *The Desire of Ages* in 1947, I was confronted by a paradox I could not resolve. So in college I asked each theology professor (1950-1954): "If Christ's human nature was the same as ours and He was tempted as we are, how did He remain free from sinful tendencies before He reached the age of reason and moral choice"? To my disappointment, not one would even touch the issue. But the answer came in 1956 when a Jehovah's Witness, Morris Flenaugh, began to attend my church in Fairbanks, Alaska.

In alarm, the JW leader asked to meet me in his home. Flenaugh was delighted with my answers to his claim that Jesus was "totally and only a man." But, sensing the need for better answers, I spent many weeks in a prayerful study of the Bible in which time I found my answer. In becoming incarnate, **Jesus submitted His body as a temple**, to do His Father's will. On the basis of this choice, the Holy Spirit was free to protect His infant mind from self-centeredness and willfulness -- root of all sin. Though He took our fallen nature, "according to the flesh," we acquire the connection to God which He had "according to the Spirit" (spiritual nature) only when, coming to the age of reason, we recognize and confess our sinfulness and **surrender our bodies as temples** to the Spirit (Rom. 1:3,4; 8:2-3; Heb 10:5-16).

I had no idea of the tension then developing over this paradox -- much less that discussions with Evangelicals would precipitate open warfare a year later, with the publishing of QOD. Unfortunately, to correct an over-focus on Christ's humanity and His role as Example, QOD authors exchanged one pole of truth for the converse pole. In shifting the focus to His divinity and His role as Substitute, they denied the full reality of His biological inheritance.

Meanwhile, I was delighted with QOD's attempt to communicate effectively with Evangelicals, to whom our terms often have very different meanings. Though confused by the claim that Christ's fallen nature was "imputed," I was reassured by the balance of Ellen White quotes in Appendix B that the problem was inadequate-expression. I would not have been so assured, however, had I read the headings.

In 1959, soon after transferring from Alaska to Washington state, I was shocked by M. L. Andreasen's charge in "Letters to the Churches" that QOD repudiated our nature of Christ doctrine, but was more shocked to discover he was right and to read the contradictory headings in Appendix B, such as, "Took Sinless human nature"-- placed over quotes which declared that He "took fallen human nature" with the results of 4,000 years of sin!

But confidence in Andreasen himself soon evaporated with his false charges on atonement, which he declared the most serious issue. First, charging QOD with heresy for teaching sacrificial atonement at the cross, which he declared a repudiation of sanctuary atonement, he promptly contradicted and even indicted

himself by quoting Ellen White testimonies that supported QOD's two-fold, cross and sanctuary, atonement!—even while accusing its authors of denying the very doctrine, which they enunciated in great detail!

To Subordinate either Principle Destroys Paradoxes

I at first merely identified this as senility in a man past 80. But seeing the same blindness in much younger men on both sides soon convinced me that the problem was failure to maintain the integrity of balancing principles of truth. Each party sees one principle as a threat to the other and neuters it by subordination to the one he defends. Though *externally* paradoxes appear contradictory, they are so *internally* united that each principle depends on the other for its meaning. Thus, to diminish either threatens the integrity of both.

This mutual splitting of paradoxes relating to Christ's nature and perfection caused me to develop the two guiding principles: first, truth always involves converse, paradoxical principles, each of which must be understood in light of its balancing principle; and second, the need to exercise priesthood of believers principles by submitting ourselves one to another -- under the authority of God's Word.

Since we are all partly blind, we must listen respectfully to contrary arguments which, however imbalanced, may offer to correct unwitting imbalances of our own. Instead of trying to prove the other wrong, let us, while presenting evidence for our own understanding of truth, we must seek to understand and identify with the other as fully as faithfulness to truth permits. My attempt at this was guided by the statement:

True Christian love cherished in the heart and exemplified in the life, would teach us to put the very best possible construction on the course of our brethren (R & H, 4-15-1880).

To "put the best possible construction on" Andreasen's course, two factors besides age must be considered. As discussions with Evangelicals began, he was lecturing throughout Southern California in defense of the spirit of prophecy, which he saw in jeopardy. When QOD authors repudiated our doctrine of Christ's fallen human nature, he was sure they were trying to destroy confidence in the testimonies. And their claim that they did not change our doctrine but only its wording convinced him of their deliberate intent to deceive.

Historical Confusion over Atonement at the Cross

Moreover, Andreasen was confused by a universally held historical error. When he entered the ministry late in the 19th century, the accepted view, held to be a basic pioneer doctrine, was that atonement did not take place on the cross but only in the sanctuary. Indeed, even QOD authors (six decades later) believed this to be the pioneer position.

Andreasen, meanwhile, had become aware of Ellen White's testimonies to

atonement at the cross. But he had not faced the conflict between these and the so-called pioneer view. Thus he used Crosier's 1846 denial of atonement on the cross to charge QOD with heresy. But, reminded by QOD's testimonies declaring atonement at the cross, he quoted some of his own, thus contradicting himself and bringing his heresy charge down upon his own head (as well as upon Ellen White's head).

How different our discussions might have been had anyone then known that QOD actually recovered the real pioneer view. But this was only discovered a decade ago, when in response to my "Questions on Doctrine Revisited" manuscript (published in 2005), Bob Pickle researched pioneer writings with astonishing results.

Until 1857 our pioneers uniformly testified to **sacrificial** atonement at the cross as the basis for **priestly** atonement in heaven. Moreover, in the same year (1858) that J. H. Waggoner first denied it, Uriah Smith and Ellen White both testified to atonement at the cross.¹ Yet, within the next fifteen years Smith joined Waggoner. And during the last three decades of the century their combined denial of atonement at the cross totally drowned out Ellen White's continued testimony to atonement on the cross.

Battle Over Last Generation Perfection

In the 1888 era E. J. Waggoner tried to restore unity to the cross and sanctuary atonement by a cross-centered focus. But Smith's opposition triggered a conflict that was never resolved and ultimately resulted in the QOD conflict. QOD opponents acknowledge the importance of the cross but focus on the sanctuary and insist that, to become our perfect Example Christ took the sinful nature of Adam. Meanwhile, QOD defenders, contrary to QOD, diminish or deny sanctuary atonement, as they focus on the cross and Christ as our Substitute and, as did QOD, insist took the sinless nature of Adam.

The solar plexus of this conflict has long centered on Andreasen's final generation perfection, with its focus on Christ as our Example in our sinful nature. But his defenders fail to properly base this on the completed sacrificial atonement of Christ, our Substitute. By contrast, QOD defenders not only deny last generation perfection but, contrary to QOD, many deny sanctuary atonement, claiming only sacrificial atonement on the cross.

In splitting the two-fold paradox, both are right in what is proclaimed but wrong in what is denied. QOD defenders rightly insist on the sinless spiritual nature of Christ, but wrongly oppose His post-fall inheritance. Meanwhile, opponents are right to insist that He came in a fallen nature. But, though claiming He was ever sinless, they err in failing to proclaim a sinless spiritual nature.

¹ A. Leroy Moore, *Questions on Doctrine Revisited*, AB Publishing, p. 127-131.

Key to Perfection: Christ's Righteousness Delivered Via the Cross

In time, both sides have become less uniform, some going to great extremes. Yet, thankfully, the importance of paradoxical unity is now increasingly recognized. Some who believe God plans to display His righteousness through His people in a final refutation of Satan's lie, that God's law cannot be consistently kept, but clearly see that our corruption is so deep as to infect the will of even the converted and see that a focus on perfection, as based on intense, uncompromised will, can only produce defeat and depression and/or external victory that breeds self-righteousness. These increasingly see a key to this paradox in Christ as our Substitute, whose pre-incarnate submission to the Holy Spirit was, as our Example, renewed with every moral choice throughout life.

To properly understand God's purpose in perfecting His people, we must grasp both how Christ was like us in nature and how He was unlike us. As indicated by Psalms 40:6-8 and Hebrews 10:5-7, He could remain sinless in fallen human nature only by submitting that nature to the Holy Spirit at the incarnation. Thus ever united to the Spirit, He never acquired a carnal nature by submitting His will to its fallen impulses. Always subject to the Spirit, there was never enmity between Him and His Father, Whom He ever delighted to obey (Rom 8:5-7).

By contrast, we are carnal, having from infancy surrendered to fleshly impulses ((Rom 7:14-18). Even after conversion, instinctive enmity remains that can be overcome only as Christ, our crucified Substitute becomes central to our sanctuary focus. For only by the cross can the Spirit fuse our wills with God's will. The key to last generation perfection is thus the unity between the cross and Day of Atonement cleansing.

Before dying for our sins, Christ first lived a perfect life for us, to be imputed as faith accepts Him as Substitute. Thus we are accounted perfect even as we seek to be like Him, yet realize that, however intense its effort, will itself can never transform a proud, self-centered heart.

Nor is perfection a condition of salvation; for we are saved by His righteousness. As in gratitude we seek by His presence to reveal His character, our focus shifts from our perfection to Christ Our Righteousness. And as we look to and depend upon Him, He assumes full responsibility for our victory over pride, root of all sin, and for portraying within us the glory of His righteousness. Note how Scripture portrays this process:

For whom He did foreknow, them He did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom 8:29).

I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice ... And be not conformed to this world but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds ... (Rom 12:1-2).

Looking unto Jesus, Author and Finisher of our faith (Heb 12:2).

We all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Cor. 3:12).

Let us unite in seeking final generation perfection by responding to Christ's prayer for His people to the end of time, just before His betrayal, "that they all may be one: as Thou Father, art in Me and I in Thee; ... that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me. ... **that they may be made perfect in one** (Jn 17:21, 23). John calls us to be "**made perfect in love**" and identifies this as the condition for facing the judgment, "**Herein is our love made perfect**, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment" (1 Jn 4:18, 17).

Perfection in love alone can free us from all sinful habits and prepare us for the final judgment. And love requires humble relations one to another in a defense of truth that is accompanied by active exercise of priesthood of believer principles. Thus alone can we overcome pride and self-centeredness that underlie every sinful behavior.

Meanwhile, only in loving and preferring one another do we permit the Holy Spirit to unite us in the balance of truth and to renew us in the image of Christ – Whose Day of Atonement prayer is that we become one in Him. This is the basis for perfection, the condition for final proclamation of the gospel of the character of God's love. May He unite us in a quest for truth and love through His Spirit.