

# That Problematic Adventist Christology

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1. Historic Adventist Christology is perceived as being extremely problematic by the Christian world because it is diametrically opposed to the idea that Christ took the sinless nature of Adam before the Fall, and could, therefore not have sinned;
2. The question is, “Does it really matter what one believes regarding the human nature of Christ? Is one's understanding on this issue crucial for salvation?”
3. That Christ took the post-fall nature of Adam is one of our historic, solid, core teachings and to tamper with it is to undermine many other beliefs in Adventism such as the atonement, the High priestly ministration of Christ, the Law of God, righteousness by faith, total victory over sin, character perfection for the final generation, the three angels messages and others;
4. It is presented by objectors within and without the Adventist church that our Lord Jesus could not have come in fallen, sinful humanity at the Incarnation, otherwise He would be tainted with sin and no longer qualify a sinless offering; objectors even appeal to the writings of Ellen White for proof:
5. **IMPORTANT:** Again, one's understanding of the humanity of Christ has repercussions on how he understands many other things crucial for salvation, such as Law and Grace, obedience to God's commandments, character development and others. Therefore Christology is a vital topic that must be clearly understood;

## The Biblical Basis for Adventist Christology

6. The Bible teaches that the humanity Jesus took at His incarnation was the same identical dilapidated, degenerate flesh common to all descendants of Adam, with all its physical and moral liabilities and weaknesses;
  - a. **Phil 2:5-8**—Jesus made in the likeness of men. . .
  - b. **Rom 8:3**--God sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. . .
  - c. **Gal 4:4**—Jesus made of woman. Made under the Law. . .
  - d. **Heb 2:14**—Jesus Himself likewise took part of the same flesh and blood . . .
  - e. **Heb 2:17**—in all things, Jesus made like unto His brethren. . .
7. The historic Adventist position on the nature of Christ is perhaps best expressed in the statement found in the 1915 Bible Readings for the Home Circle (See **Appendix B**):

## More Important Points to Consider

8. **Heb 2:14-15**-- Jesus Himself likewise took part of the same flesh and blood that He might experience death to destroy him that had power over death, that is, the Devil; sinless humanity could not have experienced death (Heb 2:9);

9. **Heb 2:16-17**-- In all things, Jesus made like unto His brethren that He might understand the trials and tribulations associated with having fallen, sinful flesh and be able to exercise compassion as he is also compassed with infirmity; sinless angels who are not counted as being "among men" (**Heb 5:1-2**) cannot possibly sympathize with fallen humanity because they do not know by experience what it is like to have a fallen sinful, weak degenerate flesh; **Jesus took not on Him the nature angels but took on Him the nature of Abraham, a fallen human being for this reason;**

10. **Heb 2:18**--Christ could not have "suffered" being tempted if He had come in an unfallen sinless nature for that nature is in perfect harmony with the Law of God; in that unfallen nature, obedience to the Law of God is the easiest and the most natural thing to do and temptation would not have involved suffering; **Jesus could not have suffered being tempted if he had come in unfallen flesh;**

- a. Ellen White understood the extent of Christ's suffering as a human being compassed with infirmity, when tempted not to follow God's will because it involved a cross:

" . . .The human will of Christ would not have led him to the wilderness of temptation, to fast, and to be tempted of the devil. It would not have led him to endure humiliation, scorn, reproach, suffering, and death. His human nature shrank from all these things as decidedly as ours shrinks from them. He endured the contradiction of sinners against himself. The contrast between the life and character of Christ and our life and character is painful to contemplate. What did Christ live to do? It was the will of his heavenly Father. Christ left us an example, that we should follow in his steps. Are we doing it?" -**ST Oct. 29, 1894.**

11. It is said that there are about 600 EGW statements that teach that Jesus took Adam's fallen nature in harmony with the Biblical evidence so that there should be no question as to where EGW and the denomination stand on the issue of the humanity of Christ. (See **Appendix D** for a sampling Ellen White statements on the nature of Christ)

12. Unfortunately, some of her writings are used (or **misused** and **abused** ) and taken out of context to give the impression that she teaches otherwise on the nature of Christ's humanity; the most notorious example of this is perhaps the misuse of her letter to an elder in the church named Baker:

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**. He was assailed with temptations in the wilderness, as Adam was assailed with temptations in Eden. . . 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. **5BC 1128**, (EGW letter to an Elder Baker)

- a. This statement is (mis)quoted to present the idea that EGW teaches (contrary to an overwhelming large number of quotes that teach otherwise) that Christ had no propensities to sin and therefore took the sinless nature of Adam before the Fall:
- b. **ANALYSIS:** We are not left guessing as to what “**propensities of sin**” means in the statement because she clearly explains what she meant by it--- she defines it as either being “**inherent propensities**” or “**evil propensities**” and then she clearly defines in the same statement the difference between both, so that there is no confusion as to what Jesus possessed and did not possess in His assumed humanity:

i. “**inherent propensities**”—according to her own definition in the statement, it is the tendency, leaning or inclination to disobey God and to do wrong in the children of Adam received as an inheritance from birth; this kind of propensity therefore, belongs to the realm of the **physical nature** and primarily deals with its **cravings** and **desires** which are unnatural and sinful as a result of the Fall and have their origin or seat in the body; Jesus must have taken this physical liability upon Himself by merely being born into the human family and made subject to the law of heredity; this is the basis for Paul’s claim that Jesus was “made like unto His brethren” (**Heb 2:17**), “made in the likeness of sinful flesh” (**Rom 8:3**), “took part of the same flesh and blood” (**Heb 2:14**) and “made in the likeness of men” (**Phil 2:7**); nowhere is it taught in Scriptures that Jesus was “exempt” from this liability!

ii. “**evil propensities**”—based on her own definition in the statement, this propensity has nothing to do with inheritance by birth, but is the tendency, leaning or inclination to disobey God as a result of falling under and yielding to temptation by choice; **evil propensities** therefore belong to the realm of exercising the will, the power of choice, in response to the inherently sinful cravings of a fallen physical nature; **evil propensities** has to do with the development of a defective character or spiritual nature as result of indulging in sinful practices; in other words, the sinfulness of **human character** which is developed and cultivated as a result of exercising the will and the power of choice on the side of evil; in this statement, Jesus is said to not have **evil propensities** because He never fell for one moment by yielding to the temptation to sin;

## The Dual Nature of “Propensities to Sin” Explained in Romans 7

13. Paul’s systematic treatise on the sinfulness of fallen humanity in the book of Romans is in perfect harmony with Ellen White’s teaching about the dual nature of “**propensities of sin**”:
14. Paul speaks of the “carnal man” in **Romans 7** and explains why his case is totally hopeless, apart from the grace of God:
  - a. “**Sin dwelling in me**” (**Rom 7:14-20**)--refers to the carnal man's sinful **spiritual nature**; identical to the defective character which is in slavery to the flesh; also identified as the “heart which is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked” (**Jer 17:9**); out of which emerges a host of sinful actions like thefts, adulteries, murders, lasciviousness, fornications (**Mark 7:22-23**) when the circumstances are right; not passed on to children by inheritance but is cultivated;

- b. **"The law of sin in my members" (Rom 7:23-25, 18)**--the ruined **physical nature** which serves as the source of fallen man's perverted taste and cravings; other characteristics include:
  - i. nothing good dwells in flesh (**verse 18**)
  - ii. "wars against the law of my mind" or the divine nature and brings it into captivity to the law of sin in my members (**verse 23**)
  - iii. the carnal man serves the law of sin in the flesh (**verse 25**)

15. Paul's argument in Romans 7 is that human sinfulness is a hopeless situation apart from Christ since both the **spiritual** and **physical** natures are corrupt and given over to sin; this is true before and after conversion;

16. Notice how Paul definition of the sinfulness of man in Romans 7 fits perfectly Ellen White's hamartology as she explained it in the Baker letter (**5 BC 1128**):

Ellen G. White	Paul
inherent propensities	= law of sin in my members or in the flesh (Rom 7:14-20) sin in the flesh (Rom 8:3)
evil propensities	= sin dwelling in me

### Paul and Ellen White's Christology Line Up Perfectly

17. Amazingly, both Paul and Ellen White's Christology are in perfect alignment
- a. Ellen White taught that Jesus did not have **"evil propensities"** and Paul did not say anything about Jesus having to contend with **"sin dwelling in me"** in **Rom 8:3** because He never had it;
  - b. Paul declared that Jesus condemned **"sin in the flesh"** while Ellen White said that Jesus accepted the workings of the great law of heredity like any child of Adam and therefore inherited the same degenerate, morally weakened physical nature which was prone to sin by default;
  - c. Ellen White was correct then in saying that Jesus had **"no evil propensities"** ("sin dwelling in me") although He had to contend with **"sin in the flesh" (inherited propensities)** all His life gaining victory over it moment by moment; the only way Jesus would have contended with sin dwelling in me is if He had yielded to sin once and developed a defective character;

Through sin the whole human organism is deranged, the mind is perverted, the imagination corrupted. Sin has degraded the faculties of the soul. Temptations from without find an answering chord within the heart, and the feet turn imperceptibly toward evil. **MH 451.**

18. Ellen White's statement below sheds light on what it means to "condemn sin in the flesh"

**"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. The love of God must reign supreme; Christ must occupy an undivided throne. Our bodies are to be regarded as His purchased possession. The members of the body are to become the instruments of righteousness. **AH 127.**

## Be Extremely Careful in Presenting the Nature of Christ

19. Why did not Jesus end up going over the man of Romans 7 experience? Jesus did not go through the man of **Romans 7** experience of... "**the good I want to do I can't do and the evil I don't want to do that I end up doing**" for the simple reason that He never yielded to temptation and cultivated "**sin dwelling in me**" or evil propensities;
20. **IMPORTANT:** Just like Ellen White said, we need to be "extremely careful on how we dwell on the nature of Christ."
- In our effort to dwell on the **likeness** of Christ's human nature with our fallen sinful human nature, we must not present Him as having taken our "sinfulness of character" ("Sin dwelling in me" or "evil propensities");
  - When we say that Jesus completely identified with our fallen humanity and was made exactly like us in His human nature, we must not give the impression that Jesus was like us who go through the man of Romans 7 experience, struggling to do the good we want to do, but ending up doing the evil we do not want to do;
21. In other words, Jesus was like us in all things in His physical nature, but He was unlike us in His spiritual nature which was immaculate and sinless;

## Victory Over Propensities of Sin Possible Even Now

22. Jesus is not our Example in the Romans 7 experience; He is our Example of living above propensities of sin in all its aspects; He is our Example of a victorious Spirit-filled life!
23. There is no excuse therefore, for not gaining the victory over propensities of sin, whether inherited or cultivated. (**Heb 4:16; Phil 4:13**)

We need not retain one sinful propensity. . . . [Ephesians 2:1-6 quoted.] . . . As we partake of the divine nature, **hereditary** and **cultivated** tendencies to wrong are cut away from the character, and we are made a living power for good. **7BC 943 on 2 Pet 1:4**

## Attempts to Compromise on the Nature of Christ

24. Sadly but truly, there have been numerous attempts in the past on the part of our leaders to compromise on the vital issue of the human nature of Christ; these attempts are admittedly well-meaning because no church administrator likes to have the denomination stigmatized and being labeled as a cult by the more influential Evangelical churches over the nature of Christ;

**25. First official attempt to compromise on Adventist Christology**

- a. In 1949, Roy A. Anderson with the help of L. E. Froom revised the popular Adventist publication called **Bible Readings for the Home Circle**, 1915 edition, and removed the statement that said Jesus took sinful fallen human nature (See **Appendix B** for the expunged text in **Bible Readings**)
- b. This official action was made to appease Dr. Schuyler English, a prominent evangelical scholar in those days who discovered the "offending" statement in **Bible Readings** and started accusing Adventists of denigrating Christ for teaching that he took a sinful fallen nature; (See **Appendix C** for R. A. Anderson's own remarks about the change made in Bible Reading, 1915 edition)

**26. Second official attempt to compromise on Adventist Christology**

- a. During the evangelical conferences of March, 1955 to August, 1957, R. A. Anderson along with L. E. Froom and joined later on by W. E. Read, made a second official attempt to change the historic Adventist position on the nature of Christ in the publication called **Questions on Doctrine**

"Although born in the flesh, He was nevertheless God, and was exempt from the inherited passions and pollutions that corrupt the natural descendants of Adam. He was without sin, not only in His outward conduct, but in His very nature." **QOD, 383**

**Finally, Adventist Beliefs Fall Like Dominoes. . .**

27. The Adventist teaching of the sanctuary and the final atonement, the Law of God, victory over sin for the Last Generation, the Three Angels Messages were all compromised as a result of the change in the historic Adventist Christology;
28. If Jesus was born with a Pre-fall nature and was "exempt" and did not have a fallen human nature like us, then He was not made like unto His brethren, and His sinless life is no longer an Example for us to follow;
29. Human beings do not need to try to stop sinning because they cannot stop sinning; therefore, God is not concerned about people overcoming sin but simply providing salvation to save people in sins;
30. It finally boils down to one thing: it proves the lie of Satan that the Law cannot be kept!!!

Satan had pointed to Adam's sin as proof that God's law was unjust, and could not be obeyed. <b>DA 117.</b>
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31. If the Law cannot be kept, then what is the use of Jesus doing a work of final ministrations in the Most Holy Place to cleanse His people and blot out their sins?

32. What is the use of preaching about the Last Generation of victorious Christians who reflect the character of Jesus fully and keep the commandments of God?
33. What is the use of preaching the three angels' messages and calling a people out of Babylon and warning about a judgment? All these become pointless and meaningless. . .
34. The question finally is, "What has the denomination gained by compromising on the nature of Christ?" Greater acceptability, perhaps? "Was it worth the price of delaying further the coming of Christ? . . ."

## Appendix A

### Other Statements (mis)used by objectors to prove that EGW supported the idea that Christ came in the pre-fall nature of Adam:

#### 1. (Mis)used EGW Statement #2:

Christ is called the second Adam. In purity and holiness, connected with God and beloved by God, He began where the first Adam began. Willingly He passed over the ground where Adam fell, and redeemed Adam's failure.--YI, June 2, 1898 or 7BC 446, Appendix B entitled "Christ's Human Nature During the Incarnation.

**ANALYSIS:** This statement is immediately taken by objectors to mean that Jesus took the same sinless, unfallen human nature Adam had, at first. But the immediate context of the statement shows that Ellen White is not taking about the sinlessness or sinfulness of the human of Christ or Adam; she is merely stating that Jesus began on the same ground, the same battlefield, the same point of temptation that Adam began and fell---the point of appetite! the statement below clarifies the misquoted text under consideration and explains to us in what sense Christ began where Adam began:

"With Christ, as with the holy pair in Eden, appetite was the ground of the first great temptation. Just where the ruin began, the work of our redemption must begin. As by the indulgence of appetite Adam fell, so by the denial of appetite Christ must overcome." DA 117.

#### 2. (Mis)used EGW Statement #2:

". . .The nature by which the enemy was overcome is the same nature over which in Eden he obtained an easy victory. . . " 12 MR 410.

**ANALYSIS:** When the entire paragraph is read, however (see below), the context of the quote becomes obvious; it was in human nature that Christ, relying upon God, obtained an easy victory. He did not overcome in the nature of angels. The statement tells us that Jesus came as a man and overcame Satan; Ellen White is not discussing sinlessness or the sinfulness of that human nature in the passage; the nature He took was the same as that of Adam's in the sense that both natures were human nature, but it was not in the same condition of perfection and purity, as other statements show.

When Christ bowed His head and died, He bore the pillars of Satan's kingdom with Him to the earth. He vanquished Satan in our human nature. The nature by which the enemy was overcome is the same nature over which in Eden he obtained an easy victory. He sustained a humiliating defeat. He was overcome by the human nature of Christ. The power of the Saviour's Godhead was hidden. He must overcome in human nature, relying upon God for His power. This is the privilege of all who accept Jesus Christ. In proportion to their faith will be their victory. 12 MR 410 (YI Apr 25, 1901 or 7BC 924 on Heb 2:14, Satan Vanquished at the Cross)



### 3. (Mis)used EGW Statement #3:

In the fullness of time He was to be revealed in human form. He was to take His position at the head of humanity by taking the nature but not the sinfulness of man. **7BC 446, Appendix B entitled "Christ's Human Nature During the Incarnation."**

**ANALYSIS:** This statement is taken to mean that Jesus took the sinless nature of Adam at the Incarnation. As already explained however, Jesus condemned "sin in the flesh", a reference to Christ's victory over the degenerate physical nature He had in common with the human race, with all its sinful leanings and depraved passions transmitted only through the great law of heredity.

As His human will never did yield to these clamors and cravings, He never developed or cultivated a sinful character and never possessed the sinfulness of character the man of Roman 7 is described as having ("sin dwelling in me"); this is the sinfulness of man Jesus did not take at the head of the humanity.

## Appendix B

### Change in the Bible Readings for the Home Circle, 1915 edition

The Bible readings for the Home Circle, 1915 edition contained the statement below. This was expunged from the book in 1949 to make the Adventist position more in line with that of the Evangelicals on the Nature of Christ:

#### Chapter 39. A Sinless Life

**NOTE.-** In His humanity Christ partook of our sinful, fallen nature. If not, then He was not "made like unto His brethren," was not "in all points tempted like as we are," did not overcome as we have to overcome, and is not, therefore, the complete and perfect Saviour man needs and must have to be saved. The idea that Christ was born of an immaculate or sinless mother, inherited no tendencies to sin, and for this reason did not sin, removes Him from the realm of a fallen world, and from the very place where help is needed. On His human side, Christ inherited just what every child of Adam inherits, - a sinful nature. On the divine side, from His very conception He was begotten and born of the Spirit. And all this was done to place mankind on vantage-ground, and to demonstrate that *in the same way* every one who is "born of the Spirit" may gain like victories over sin in his own sinful flesh. Thus each one is to overcome *as Christ overcame*. Rev. 3:21. Without this birth there can be no victory over temptation, and no salvation from sin. John 3:3-7.

## Appendix C

### R. A. Anderson's Own Remarks Regarding the Change Made in Bible Readings, 1915 Edition

"Many years ago a statement appeared in Bible Readings for the Home Circle (1915 edition) which declared that Christ came in 'sinful flesh'. . .It has been quoted many times by critics, and all around the world, as being typical of Adventist Christology. But when that book was revised in 1949, this expression was eliminated, since it was recognized as being out of harmony with our true position." --**Roy A. Anderson, "Human, Not Carnal," Ministry magazine, Sept. 14, 1956.**"

## Appendix D

### Two Incontrovertible Statements from Ellen White on Adventist Christology

#### **Jesus accepted the working of the great law of heredity**

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.

**DA 49**

#### **Christ took upon Him the infirmities of degenerate humanity**

Satan had pointed to Adam's sin as proof that God's law was unjust, and could not be obeyed. 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. He was surrounded with the glories of Eden, and was in daily communion with heavenly beings. 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.

Many claim that it was impossible for Christ to be overcome by temptation. Then He could not have been placed in Adam's position; He could not have gained the victory that Adam failed to gain. If we have in any sense a more trying conflict than had Christ, then He would not be able to succor us. But our Saviour took humanity, with all its liabilities. He took the nature of man, with the possibility of yielding to temptation. We have nothing to bear which He has not endured. **DA 117.**