

Our Saviour's Weakened Human Nature

A reader asks, “Could Christ have contracted disease while on earth? He had no original sin and had He not had our sins imputed to Him would never have died. Correct?” There are really two questions in what the reader writes. I will try to answer both of them in turn.

Our answer to the first one, “Could Christ have contracted disease while on earth?” must be in the affirmative. We never read that our Lord was sick but Paul does write, “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:3-4).

Christ came not in the likeness of sinless flesh but in the likeness of sinful flesh. We must not take this to mean that Christ could sin for He most emphatically could not. Scripture is clear on that. He is the Second Person of the Trinity who possesses the entire divine nature and He united to it His human nature. He was God in our flesh and God cannot sin: “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man” (James 1:13).

That He came in the likeness of sinful flesh means that He did not come in the strong and powerful human nature that Adam possessed before he fell but in the likeness of our flesh: weak, subject to trouble and disease, easily wearied (for our Lord was weary, hungry and thirsty) and eroded by 6,000 years of sinning. This is why, for example, Hebrews can tell us that He was tempted, even as we are tempted. He knew from experience the power and attractiveness of temptations. As such, He is a sympathetic high priest to whom we may boldly come to seek forgiveness and strength to stand against the wiles of the devil (Heb. 4:15-16).

I remember that long ago my pastor, Rev. Herman Hoeksema, began a sermon on Hebrews 4:15-16 with these words: “Beloved, this is such a beautiful and comforting text that I thought about reading it several times and then sending you home. I am afraid I might spoil it.” He then preached a sermon that was gripping, comforting and spiritually encouraging. The text is possible only because our Lord was born in the likeness of sinful flesh.

Christ was born a baby, weak, helpless, dependent on His mother and crying when He was hungry, yet without any sinful petulance. He did not have a halo on His head, any more than any of us has a halo—even though in our pride we sometimes think we do.

(continued on p. 4)

Finally, Psalm 103:3 reads, “Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases.” Our Lord could not heal our diseases without experiencing them Himself. He was indeed like us in all things—except sin.

The second question cannot be answered. It is like asking: If Adam and Eve had not eaten of the forbidden tree, and they had lived forever, how many children would they have had? Or, if Adam and Eve had not sinned, would everyone now born have also been born, only in a state of moral perfection?

The fact of the matter is that Christ came into the world in order that sin might be imputed to Him. If one looks at the matter from the historical viewpoint, one would say that Adam and the whole human race sinned, and God provided Christ in order that He might save His elect from the fallen human race through the imputation of their sin to Christ. God sent Christ into the world to bear the sins and guilt of His people. If God had determined not to save a people for Himself, He would never have sent Christ into the world. The moment Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit the sin of the elect was imputed to Him. It was the very purpose for His coming into the world. “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (II Cor. 5:21).

Paul calls this the “great” “mystery” (I Tim. 3:16), for God’s purpose is profound and glorious, and the way of salvation is a wonder of which no mere creature could possibly have thought. Here is where the Arminian, with his heresy of a universal, ineffectual atonement, comes to disaster—with all his false theology. God imputed our sin to Christ. That means that Christ suffered the full penalty of sin for all those whose sin was imputed to Him. He bore the penalty of sin that consisted of death when God drives man from the world and assigns him an eternity of punishment in hell: “To live apart from God is death!”

If God imputed to Christ the sin of all men absolutely, no man any longer can or will perish in hell; all will be saved. But if God chose to glorify Himself through Christ (Eph. 1:3-14), and through Christ by imputing to Him the sins of the elect, then Christ had to die and go to hell for the elect alone.

Blessed gospel! “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (II Cor. 5:19).
Prof. Hanko

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God's Longsuffering in the New Testament

In the last two issues of the *News*, we looked at God's longsuffering in the Old Testament. Now we turn to the seven New Testament instances.

The first reference to God's longsuffering in the New Testament is Luke 18:7: "And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he *bear long* with them?" The object of Jehovah's bearing or suffering long in this text is "his own elect," those whom He chose in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4).

The last biblical references to the longsuffering of the Most High are found in Peter's two canonical epistles. In I Peter 3:20, we read that "the *longsuffering* of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water." Here Jehovah's longsuffering is directed not to the wicked world He destroyed by the flood but to the "eight souls" (Noah and his three sons with their four wives) who were "saved" by water, as a picture of their eternal salvation.

The apostle Peter next speaks of God's longsuffering in II Peter 3:9: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is *longsuffering* to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Here we are told that God's "longsuffering [is] to us-ward," namely, the "beloved" (1), those who "have obtained like precious faith" with Peter and all the saints (1:1), and who are the objects of Jehovah's "calling and election" (10), as opposed to the "scoffers" (3:3).

Those to whom the Almighty is longsuffering are the ones whom He wills, wishes, wants and desires not to "perish" but to "come to repentance" (9). The sovereign and unchangeable Lord, in His infinite wisdom, power and grace, effectually calls all of His own, for "who hath resisted his will?" (Rom. 9:19). Notice that II Peter 3 explains why Christ has not yet returned. It is not that the Lord is "slack concerning His promise" (9), as the scoffers claimed, but that all of God's elect church, all the stones in Jehovah's spiritual temple, all the members of the body of Christ, must be brought to salvation before He comes back to judge the world.

This fits perfectly with Peter's third and final reference to the Lord's longsuffering: "And account that the *longsuffering* of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you" (15).

Notice three things in this text. First, the apostle asserts that "the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation," for those to whom the sovereign and omnipotent God is longsuffering are always saved! Second, this is to be a theological first principle with Christians in their thinking regarding Jehovah's longsuffering: "*account* [i.e., consider, deem, think or reckon with deliberate and careful judgment] that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation." Third, the effectual and saving power of God's longsuffering is also the inspired teaching of the great apostle of grace: "even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you."

In Romans 9:22, that great theologian asks, "What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much *longsuffering* the vessels of wrath

fitted to destruction ...?"

Here we are taught that Jehovah "*endured* ... the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction [i.e., the reprobate]." He puts up with them for a while because He shall display His glory through His holy "wrath" and awesome "power" in His "destruction" of them as "vessels of wrath" for all their sin and rebellion. This is what God desires, wishes and wants: "God, *willing* to shew his wrath, and to make his power known." Reprobation (22) serves God's election of both Jews and Gentiles, whereby he "make[s] known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory" (23).

We need carefully to distinguish between God's *enduring* or putting up with the reprobate (cf. Matt. 17:17; Mark 9:19; Luke 9:41) and His being *longsuffering* towards His elect (Luke 18:7). The Almighty "*endured* ... the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction [i.e., the reprobate]" (Rom. 9:22). How did He do this? The answer is found in the subordinate clause: "with much longsuffering" towards His elect (22). Remember that "the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation" (II Pet. 3:15).

This is Paul's other reference to God's longsuffering in Romans: "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and *longsuffering*; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (2:4). This does not refer to a "goodness" or "longsuffering" of God for the reprobate. First, the text does not say that Jehovah's goodness or longsuffering merely *tries* (but fails) to lead the reprobate to repentance; it says that "the goodness of God *leadeth* thee to repentance." Second, the verse speaks not of merely a bit of common grace for the reprobate, as some allege, but of "the *riches* of his goodness."

Romans 2:4 is not addressed to man as elect or reprobate but to generic and undifferentiated man. Thus he is addressed in the context as "O man" (1, 3). If we come to differentiation, God's "forbearance" is for the reprobate, as in Romans 9:22; His longsuffering is for the elect (Luke 18:7) and is always salvific (II Pet. 3:15).

The very same apostle Paul is the great biblical example of Jehovah's longsuffering to an elect sinner: "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all *longsuffering*, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting" (I Tim. 1:16).

Paul says that God was longsuffering to him "first," not chronologically but preeminently, since he viewed himself as the "chief" of sinners (15) for he blasphemed Christ and persecuted His church (13). No wonder the apostle speaks of the Lord Jesus manifesting "*all* longsuffering" towards him, before breaking forth with a doxology: "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (17).

In God's longsuffering to him in his gross wickedness before his conversion, Paul says he is a "pattern" (16). No one is too sinful to be saved, if God wills it. If the Lord can convert Paul who ravaged Christ's church (Acts 8:1-4), then nobody is too difficult for Him. All must repent of their sins and trust in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus, the only Saviour!

Rev. Stewart