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LEARNING FROM JESUS TO LIVE IN THE MANNER JESUS WOULD IF HE WERE I

Biblical Grounding for Willard's Proposal Regarding Jesus' Humanity

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Abstract: "How *would* Jesus live your life, with your personality, with your talents, with your life experiences, within your life context, if he were you?" is a question posed by Dallas Willard in *The Divine Conspiracy*. How is it possible for Jesus Christ, Second Person of the Trinity, to know about living a really human life with all of its heartache and struggles? The chapter presents the biblical teaching for Jesus' authentic human experience, that Jesus is our genuine example and is the unique one who can show us the way into kingdom living. After addressing concerns that have been raised about emphasizing the example of Jesus, the NT data affirming Jesus' authentic human experience are presented, along with some potential objections. The main claim defended is that Jesus lived normally within his own human power, relying predominantly on the divine resources of the Father and the Holy Spirit, while using his own divine power infrequently. The chapter concludes with a few implications for practice, living within our personal human condition as Jesus did, and living beyond our human limitations as Jesus did.

The invitation for each of Jesus' apprentices, according to Dallas Willard, is "learning from Jesus to live my life as if he would live my life if he were I" (*The Divine Conspiracy*, 283, 285).¹ But how is that possible since Jesus is God? Can Jesus really know what it is like to live as a human? Did Jesus genuinely struggle against the challenges of life just like us? Or, in Jesus' common life with us, did Jesus have access to a power unique to him and unavailable to believers today? The chapter responds negatively to this last question and presents the biblical teaching for Jesus' authentic human experience, that Jesus is our genuine example for how to live the Christian life. Willard clarifies, "I am not necessarily learning to do everything [Jesus] did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did. . . . My discipleship to Jesus is, within clearly definable limits, not a matter of what I do, but of how I do it" (*The Divine Conspiracy*, 284).

The main point of the chapter is to provide the specific biblical basis supporting this claim by Willard. At a few points in the chapter, more particular comments by Willard will be included where relevant to the discussion. After addressing concerns that have been raised about emphasizing the example of Jesus, I clarify the importance of Jesus' humanity and then present the NT data affirming Jesus' authentic human experience. The chapter concludes with some practical implications. Willard asserts, "Concretely, we intend to live in the kingdom of God by intending to obey the precise example and teachings of Jesus" (*Renovation of the Heart*, 87).

The Importance of the Humanity of Jesus

At a general level, it is difficult to deny Jesus' humanity at the obvious points: he was embodied (e.g., he was thirsty, Matt. 25:35; hungry, Matt. 4:2; weary, John 4:6; and he died, John 19:30–34). He experienced a full range of emotions (e.g., weeping, Luke 19:41; compassion, Mark 6:34; righteous anger, Mark 3:5; frustration, Matt. 17:17; being troubled in spirit, Matt. 26:37). Many who encountered him, especially the religious leaders, regarded

¹ Short titles and parenthetical references are used throughout for the Willardian corpus. See *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999); *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988); *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997); *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002); *Knowing Christ Today: Why We Can Trust Spiritual Knowledge* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009).

Jesus as *nothing more than human*, not as some kind of alien or superhero from outer space. To paraphrase the Nazareth folk with whom he grew up, “It’s just Jesus, no one special” (Mark 6:3). Furthermore, Jesus was tempted (Matt. 4: 1–11)—a characteristic which Scripture denies of God (James 1:13)—yet without sinning (Heb. 4:15).

Orthodoxy affirms that Jesus’ humanity was a critical factor for our salvation. Millard Erickson notes, “If, however, Jesus was not really one of us, humanity has not been united with deity, and we cannot be saved. For the validity of the work accomplished in Christ’s death, or at least its applicability to us as human beings, depends upon the reality of his humanity, just as the efficacy of it depends upon the genuineness of his deity.”² Regarding God’s design of human nature, Bernard Ramm clarifies, “In the very act of the creation the possibility of a future incarnation was made possible. If humankind is produced in the image of God then there is some of that image in God. Hence God can become incarnate.”³ Furthermore, Paul’s comparison between Adam and Christ bears testimony to the humanity of Jesus (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:20–22 and 45–49).⁴ Through his experiences and suffering as a human, Jesus became our sympathetic high priest (Heb. 2:10–17, 4:15–16, 5:8–10), one who now intercedes for us (Rom. 8:34). Thus, Jesus is like us.

In becoming incarnate, our Lord Jesus Christ—as one person—is both fully divine and fully human. Although this study emphasizes what is commonly shared between Jesus Christ and all believers, there is no denial that Jesus is also unique and different from us; he is not *merely* human. The thrust of the current project is to draw out implications of an orthodox Christology for practical Christian living. The purpose is not to diminish the doctrine of Christ’s deity but rather to enrich our doctrine of sanctification and Christian living. By offering a refinement of our understanding of Jesus Christ we can then benefit from the Bible’s teaching that Jesus is our genuine example. Yet, as we delve into this mystery—to honor our

² Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985), 706.

³ Bernard Ramm, *An Evangelical Christology* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 53. Furthermore, Ramm explains, “In the humanity of Jesus Christ God has revealed what it is to be a true person. Hence a Christian anthropology can be constructed only from a Christology,” 77.

⁴ Did Jesus fulfill a *moral* obligation by defeating Satan *in his humanity* as the Second Adam, since the First Adam surrendered his rightful role (e.g., Heb. 2:14–15)?

Lord's full humanity—we must do so cautiously so as not to diminish his full deity.⁵

Is Jesus Our Example?

A clear understanding that Jesus lived a genuinely human life does not seem to be a common *practical* article of faith among Christians. Despite the popular appeal for the “What Would Jesus Do?” slogan, down deep believers tend to let Jesus' deity trump his humanity. For example, how do you think most believers would answer the following questions?

“How could Jesus know the thoughts of others?” “Because he was God.”

“How could Jesus resist temptation and live without sin?” “Because he was God.”

“How could Jesus perform miracles?” “Because he was God.”

“How could Jesus forgive his enemies while being tortured on the cross?” “Because he was God.”

It is obvious that *if* Jesus normally relied on his own divine power in living his life and engaging in ministry while on earth, then humans *cannot* emulate Jesus' normal example.

Scholarly Reluctance about Jesus' Human Example

Some biblical scholars are not convinced that the NT writers actually present Jesus' life on earth as an example for believers, and argue that instead of imitation, the NT always stresses allegiance and obedience to the *risen* Lord. For example, Wilhelm Michaelis claimed of the verb “to imitate”: “There is thus no thought of an imitation, whether outward or inward, of the earthly life of Jesus in either individual features or total impress. The call for an *imitatio Christi* finds no support in the statements of Paul.”⁶ Others claim that Jesus' command to follow him (e.g., John 8:12, 10:27) cannot be

⁵The study works with the canonical New Testament texts and within the basic boundary conditions for orthodox theological inquiry as set down by the Chalcedonian Definition (AD 451).

⁶Wilhelm Michaelis, “Mimeomai,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, IV, edited by Gerhard Kittel, translated by Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 672. In a footnote, Michaelis quotes Martin Dibelius: “The qualities to be imitated are not the virtues of a human person but the properties of the divine person.”

a call to imitation, but rather a call to be a loyal disciple of the Lord Jesus. To propose such a claim, an alleged distinction must be made between the word “to follow” (*akoloutheo*), which occurs only in the Gospels and Acts, and “to imitate” (*mimeomai*), occurring only in the epistles. Yet, Kevin Giles notes, “The contrast between the Gospels and the Epistles in relation to imitating Christ is therefore, in essence, not one of emphasis or theme but only one of terminology.”⁷

Marguerite Shuster raises legitimate concerns about studying Jesus as our example, “My fundamental point is that what we need, and what the NT offers us, is first and foremost, not an example, but a Savior. My major caveat with respect to imitation themes is that they tend to obscure that fundamental point.”⁸ Of course any exclusive focus on the example of Jesus effectively truncates the genuine gospel. Sanctification must never be reduced to our own moral effort. It is a process in which God the Spirit works, and in which we cooperate, attending to what is in our power to do, sustained by God’s power (e.g., Eph. 4:17–24; Phil. 2:12–13). Yet, once Jesus is affirmed as our Savior and our High Priest, can Jesus also serve as our example to imitate?⁹

Ralph Martin, in his often-cited study on Philippians 2:5–11, claims that the exaltation of Christ is the focus of Paul’s exhortation not his life on earth.

The Apostolic summons is not: Follow Jesus by doing as He did—*an impossible feat in any case*, for who can be a “second Christ” who quits His heavenly glory and dies in shame and is taken up into the throne of the universe? The appeal and injunction to the

⁷ Kevin Giles, “*Imitatio Christi*’ in the New Testament,” *The Reformed Theological Review* 38, no. 3 (September–December 1979): 69. Based on his reading of the two standard German monographs of the subject, Giles explains that “H. D. Betz [*Nachfolge und Nachahmung Jesu Christi im Neuen Testament*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1967] and A. Schulz [*Nachfolgen und Nachahmen*, Munich: Koesel-Verlag, 1962] carefully study these two motifs and after having analyzed each independently come to the conclusion that in substance the meaning of both is the same” (69, note #22).

⁸ Marguerite Shuster, “The Use and Misuse of the Idea of the Imitation of Christ,” *Ex Auditu* 14 (1998): 74. Yet focusing on Jesus as a moral exemplar need not lead us doctrinally astray to embrace a moral influence atonement theory. For a survey of moral example atonement theories, see Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 407–12.

⁹ Marguerite Shuster also raises two other helpful points to consider for our study (1) the misuse of the concept of imitation, particularly the selectivity of what is considered for imitation and what is ignored, and (2) that we exclude from consideration the distinctive cultural forms of that day that Jesus practiced. “Use and Misuse,” 74.

Philippians in their pride and selfishness are rather: Become in your conduct and church relationships the type of persons who, by that kenosis, death and exaltation of the Lord of glory, have a place in His body, the Church.¹⁰

Martin seems to confuse the *tasks* of Jesus' vocation, which are unique, with the *manner* in which he lived to carry out his vocation. We do not emulate his mission, and our missional tasks will vary among us, but we can emulate Jesus' manner of living.

Moreover, Joseph Hellerman has argued that Paul intentionally turns upside down the normal Roman honor motif in Philippi, which highlighted a continuing *upward* movement of the career ladder of external success.

I maintain that Paul, in his portrayal of Jesus in [Phil. 2] verses 6–8, has taken Rome's *cursus* ideology and turned it on its head, so to speak, as he presents Christ descending a *cursus pudorum* ("a succession or race of ignominies") from equality with God, to the status of a slave, to the physical and social death of public crucifixion. . . . The presentation, I suggest, was intended by Paul . . . to encourage persons in the church who possessed some degree of honor or status in the broader social world of the colony to utilize their status, after the analogy of Jesus, in the service of others.¹¹

Jesus' human life accomplished much more than being our example, yet his example for believers cannot be ignored.

As long as such ambiguity and ambivalence remains about this critical teaching of Jesus' human example, it will be difficult for believers to make much progress in responding to Jesus' invitation to "learn from me" (Matt. 11:29) that Willard proposes. Consider Alan Spence's explanation for such scholarly reluctance:

¹⁰ Ralph Martin, *A Hymn of Christ: Philippians 2:5–11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 290–91. Italics added.

¹¹ Joseph Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor in Roman Philippi: Carmen Christi as Cursus Pudorum*, SNTS Monograph 132 (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2005), 1–2.

The difficulty seems to lie in an inability to conceive of the incarnate Christ as “normative man.” Although those who hold to his divine sonship are usually quick to affirm his true humanity, there has, nevertheless, been in the past an unwillingness to give due weight to the Gospel testimony to his growth in grace, wisdom and knowledge; to his continual need of divine comfort and empowering through the Holy Spirit; and consequently to the implication that as man he stood just as we do, a creature totally dependent on his God.¹²

Table 1: Selected Lines of Evidence for Jesus as Our Example
(listed in order of presentation in the chapter; in bold key paragraph for topic)

	From Jesus' Own Words	Paul	General Epistles
As Our Example	John 13:12-17 Matt. 20:26-28, Mark 10:42-45, Luke 22:24-27, John 13:34-35; John 15:12-13 Matt. 11:29	Phil. 2:4-11; Rom. 6:11; 15:3, 7; 1 Cor. 11:1; 2 Cor. 1:5; Eph. 5:2, 25, 29; Col. 3:13; <i>Implicit</i> 1 Thess. 1:6	Heb. 12:1-11 1 Peter 2:18-25 1 Peter 4:1, (1 Peter 5:2-3) 1 John 2:5-6, 3:3, 16 <i>Implicit:</i> Heb. 4:15

Biblical Evidence for Jesus' Example

In searching the biblical data for Jesus' example, first we look at the Gospels, and then the rest of the NT (see Table 1). The most direct comment from Jesus' own words occurs when he washed the disciples' feet (John 13:12-17): "I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done for you" (John 13:15). In this declaration, note also the comparison "as I have done to you." This remarkable "just as" pattern can be observed in other passages, in which the disciples (then and now) are encouraged to live as Jesus did. For example, see Matthew 20:26-28: "It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, *even as* the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (italics added). Discussing the parallel passage in Mark 10:45, R. T. France states, "But we must not forget that this crucial verse, however great its soteriological implications, occurs in the context as a model for

¹² Alan Spence, "Christ's Humanity and Ours: John Owen," in *Persons, Divine and Human*, edited by Christoph Schwöbel and Colin E. Gunton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 75.

Jesus' disciples to follow. . . . They, too, must serve rather than be served."¹³ In the Gospels, two particular topics surface using this "just as" pattern: servanthood (Matt. 20:26–28; Luke 22:24–27; John 13:13–15) and love (John 13:34–35; John 15:12–13). In addition, Jesus uses the phrase "learn from me" in his invitation to weary disciples in Matthew 11:29.

The key passages on Jesus' example in the Epistles are Philippians 2:4–11, Hebrews 12: 1–11, and 1 Peter 2:18–25. The previously noted "just as" pattern in which believers are encouraged to live as Jesus did also is used in the rest of the New Testament (Rom. 6:11, 15:3,7; 2 Cor. 1:5; Eph. 5:2, 25, 29; Phil. 2:5; Col. 3:13; 1 Thess. 1:6; Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 4:1; 1 John 2:6, 3:3, 3:16). For example, see Philippians 2:5, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus," and 1 John 2:6, "Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked." Furthermore, Paul urged believers to imitate his own example (1 Cor. 4:16–17, 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:7–9 and 1 Tim. 1:16), just as he imitated the example of Jesus (1 Cor. 11:1, cf. 1 Thess. 1:6).

Likewise, the apostle Peter exhorted elders to serve as examples: "Shepherd the flock of God that is among you . . . not *domineering* over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock" (1 Pet. 5:2–3, italics added). Peter alludes to Jesus' own teaching and example of servanthood, using the same phrase Jesus did, "lord it over," as recorded in the synoptic Gospels (Matt. 20:25, Mark 10:42, Luke 22:25).

The biblical evidence is fairly clear that Jesus, particularly in his earthly life, is an example for us. Another related issue concerns to what extent did Jesus live within his humanity, to which we turn next.

By What Divine Power Did Jesus Live and Minister?

Some might wonder, why worry about the *source* of Jesus' supernatural power? Does it really matter? If we hold to supernatural theism, then Jesus' supernatural life and his ministry of miracles actually occurred and touched the lives of many in his day, regardless of whether he used his own divine power or relied on the supernatural power of the Father and the Holy Spirit. Yet the critical issue raised in this chapter is whether Jesus can be our *example*, including his supernaturally oriented lifestyle. William

¹³ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark, NIGTC* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 421.

Barry admits, "If Jesus is superhuman, then I can admire him, but I do not have to take seriously his call to emulate him. I can never be a superhuman being."¹⁴

Possible Options

Jesus had access to two possible sources of divine power: either (a) his own divine power, or (b) the divine resources of the Father and the Holy Spirit. Four logical positions are possible along this spectrum:

- #1. Never dependent on the divine resources of the Father and Holy Spirit and exclusively using his own divine power;
- #2. Infrequently dependent on the divine resources of the Father and Holy Spirit and predominantly using his own divine power;
- #3. Predominantly dependent on divine resources of the Father and Holy Spirit and infrequently using his own divine power; or
- #4. Exclusively dependent on divine resources of the Father and Holy Spirit, and never using his own divine power.

The Scripture provides clear evidence of some form of dependence on the divine resources of the Father and Holy Spirit, so option #1 is eliminated. The question is to what extent did Jesus rely on the Father and the Spirit, so the main choices are among options #2, #3, or #4.

The main divide on this point whether Jesus' dependency was infrequent and basically unnecessary (option #2) or was Jesus' dependence on the norm of his life on earth (either option #3 or option #4). I suspect Willard would opt for the latter case of the essential role of dependence on divine resources throughout Jesus' life, with which I agree.

Between the latter two options, it will be easier to present an argument for the weaker claim of option #3 (predominantly dependent) than the stronger claim of option #4 (exclusively dependent).¹⁵ Specifically, Jesus lived normally within his own human power, relying predominantly on

¹⁴ William Barry, *Letting God Come Close* (Chicago: Loyol, 2001), 111.

¹⁵ Defending the exclusively dependent thesis requires some sort of accounting for the occasions on which Jesus apparently did make use of his own divine power. These occasions are infrequent (e.g., forgiving sins, the transfiguration), but are part of the evidence pool and cannot be simply disregarded. I think reasonable answers can be supplied for these occasions, but since I am presenting evidence for the predominantly thesis, this additional discussion is beyond the scope of this article.

the divine resources of the Father and the Holy Spirit, while using his own divine power infrequently.

This claim regarding Jesus' predominant dependence on God, especially the Holy Spirit, is not new. According to Alan Spence, Puritan theologian John Owen (1616–1683) “regarded [Jesus’] life as man among us as the prototype of Christian existence, and as continually empowered, comforted and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”¹⁶ R. A. Torrey (1856–1928), likewise attempting to articulate only *What the Bible Teaches*, claimed that “[Jesus] lived, thought, worked, taught, conquered sin and won victories for God in the power of that same Spirit whom we all may have.”¹⁷ In 1991, Gerald Hawthorne published the sole academic monograph given wholly to discussing the relationship of the Spirit in the life of Jesus.

Without denying the reality of the incarnation, or that God became a man, it is the purpose of this book, nevertheless, to argue for the reality of Jesus' humanness and that as such he was not aided to rise above and conquer temptations *as God*, but rather as a man whose will was set to do the will of God. His sinlessness was nothing other than the continued obedience to the Father and to the Father's will.¹⁸

Yet in light of the scholarly reluctance and the continuing popular confusion regarding Jesus living as a genuine human, there seems to be a contemporary need for a new hearing of the biblical witness to Jesus' humanity and example for us in living the Christian life.

The argument for Jesus predominantly living within his humanity while depending on God is developed from biblical evidence within three categories indicating that (a) Jesus depended on the Father, (b) Jesus depended

¹⁶ Spence, “John Owen,” 75.

¹⁷ R. A. Torrey, *What the Bible Teaches* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming Revell, 1898), book 3, (chapter 9), 289.

¹⁸ Gerald Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power: The Significance of the Holy Spirit in the Life and Ministry of Jesus* (Dallas: Word, 1991; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock), p. 96, n. 94. Hawthorne's book was the stimulating inspiration that launched me toward my own continuing investigation of Jesus' humanity and example. Hawthorne appears to defend option #4. Others devote only a portion of their book on this topic, such as James Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975). For a recent proposal to develop a Trinitarian “Spirit Christology” in which the Spirit is presented as having a more prominent role within the Trinity, see Myk Habets, *The Anointed Son: A Trinitarian Spirit Christology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010).

on the Holy Spirit, and (c) Jesus exercised his own faith and trust in God. Table 2 gives an overview of the selected passages that will be cited in the discussion so one can see how these align with the three categories. We will move from the Gospels to the Epistles, and begin with *explicit* biblical support, followed by implicit evidence supplementing the main explicit argument. A few Scripture references from the Gospel of John seem to be a less explicit indication of Jesus' reliance on the Father. Otherwise, verses in the implicit category assume the principle that Jesus practiced what he preached. That is, in any teaching to his disciples to rely on available divine resources, Jesus is sharing the results of his own personal dependence pattern while living in his humanity. These teachings confirm the explicit support. Willard explains, "If we are to exercise the word and rule of God in ways regarded as spectacular by human beings, Jesus is our model, as always. . . . [God] will do this in a way that is suitable to our lives and his calling for us" (*Hearing God*, 136). Now we turn to what the New Testament teaches about Jesus as our example.

Table 2: Selected Lines of Evidence for Jesus' Dependence on God
(Listed in Order of Presentation in the Chapter)

	From Jesus' Own Words	Gospels-Acts Authors	Paul	General Epistles
Depend on the Father	John 5:19, 30; 8:28-29, 42; 12:27-28, 49-50; 14:10, 31; 15:9-10; 16:32; 17:7-8; Matt. 26:52-54; <i>Implicit:</i> John 7:28-29; 14:24; 17:18			
Depend on the Spirit	Luke 4:16-21; Matt. 12:28 (Luke 11:20) <i>Implicit:</i> John 7:37-38; Mark 13:11 (Luke 12:15) Matt. 10:19-10; Luke 12:11-12; Matt. 12:31-32; Luke 12:10; Matt. 26:41; Mark 14:38; "power" Mark 5:30; Luke 8:46; (Acts 1:8)	John 3:34; Matt. 4:1; Mark 1:12; Luke 4:1, 14; Luke 10:21; Acts 1:2, 10:38 <i>Implicit:</i> parallel John the Baptist: Luke 1:15, 80 & Jesus Luke 1:35, 2:40; Baptism: Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; "power" Luke 5:17; Luke 6:19		Heb. 9:14
Jesus' Faith in God	<i>Implicit:</i> Mark 9:23; Matt. 6:30 [Luke 12:28]; 8:26, 14:31, 16:8, 17:20; Luke 17:6		Possibly: <i>pistis Christou</i> : (faith of Christ) Rom. 3:22, 26, Gal. 2:16 [2x], 2:20, 3:22; Eph. 3:12, Phil. 3:9	Heb. 12:1-6

Dependence on the Father

There are multiple occurrences of Jesus' own declaration of his complete dependence on the Father in the Gospel of John.

“. . . for all that I heard from my Father I have made known to you.” (John 15:15)

“Truly truly, I say to you, *the Son can do nothing on his own accord*, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise.” (John 5:19, italics added)

“When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.” (John 8:28–29)

“Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but *the Father, who dwells in me, does his work*.” (John 14:10, italics added)

Similar declarations appear also in John 5:30, 8:42, 12:49–50, 14:10, 31; 15:9–10, 16:32, 17:7–8, and 17: 8–8. Carson comments on John 17:7: “The strange way of putting the last point—that everything you have given me comes from you . . . carefully emphasizes Jesus' dependence upon his Father.”¹⁹

Later in the Gospel, Jesus develops a parallel between his dependency on the Father as the analogy for how his disciples will depend on him. For example, we can compare John 5:19 quoted above with John 15:5; “I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me *you can do nothing*” (italics added). Jesus depends on the Father, and then he desires that believers experience the same kind of dependence on himself.²⁰

Following Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane and during his arrest he offers a remark about his dependence on the Father. After Peter lops off an ear of a

¹⁹ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar NTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 559–60.

²⁰ Believers are to abide *in* Christ as subsequent NT teaching emphasizes (e.g., Col. 3:15–17). Yet we still direct our prayer requests to the Father in the name of Jesus (e.g., John 15: 7, 16; 16:23, John 14:14; Matt. 6:9; e.g., Eph. 3:14).

soldier, Jesus commands Peter to put his sword down and announces, “Do you think I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matt. 26:53; cf. John 12:27). Implicit references of dependence on the Father include John 7:28–29, 14:24, and 17:18.

Dependence on the Spirit—Explicit

Willard affirms that “When we inwardly experience the heavenly sweetness and power of life—the love, joy, and peace—that Jesus knew, that is the work of the Spirit.”²¹

1. Explicit References from Jesus’ Own Words. Only a few references from Jesus’ own lips offer explicit support, but these are profound. Near the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus is the guest synagogue speaker in his hometown of Nazareth (Luke 4:16–21). He startles his hearers, after reading a prophetic passage from Isaiah 61:1–2 and states, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). He thus announces “himself to be the bearer of . . . God’s new age of salvation” being the one who has received the “anointing with God’s Spirit.”²²

Later in his ministry, Jesus makes an explicit declaration about relying on the Spirit for his exorcisms, from Matthew 12:28: “But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you”²³ (Matt. 12:28; “finger of God” Luke 11:20²⁴). Beasley-Murray notes that this saying “gives Jesus’ own explanation of his exorcisms: they are performed not by his own power but by the power of God, i.e., by the Spirit of God, and since the defeat of the evil power is a feature of the end time, they show that the kingdom of God has appeared in his activity.”²⁵ This is the initial evidence from Jesus’ own words. Later will be added implicit evidence from Jesus’ own words and teachings that can indicate a reference to his own life experience.

²¹ Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’s Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 27.

²² Darrell Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 407.

²³ Note that Jesus employs the plural “demons,” indicating this deliverance as well as others was done by the power of the Holy Spirit.

²⁴ D. A. Carson states, “Luke 11:20 has ‘the finger of God’ instead of ‘the Spirit of God.’ Possibly the latter is original . . . , but the matter is of little consequence since they both refer to the same thing (cf. Exod. 8:19; Deut. 9:10; Ps 8:3).” “Matthew,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, edited by Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 289.

²⁵ G. R. Beasley-Murray, “Jesus and the Spirit,” in *Melanges Bibliques en hommage au R. P. Beda Rigaux*, edited by A. Deschamps and A. de Hallelaneux (Gembloux: Duculot, 1970), 471.

2. Explicit Evidence from the Gospel Writers and Acts. John records Jesus as receiving the Spirit without measure (John 3:34). The various descriptions of Jesus' wilderness temptation experience include specific mention of the Holy Spirit's direct involvement (Matt. 4:1, Mark 1:12, Luke 4:1, 14; cf. Rom. 8:14, Gal. 5:18). One time Luke describes Jesus as "full of joy through the Holy Spirit" (Luke 10:21).

In the book of Acts, we learn that Jesus' final teaching to his disciples before his ascension was accomplished "through the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:2). Then, in a sermon to the Gentile Cornelius and his household, Peter offered a summary statement of the ministry of Jesus: "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10:38).

3. Explicit Evidence from the Epistles. One passage in this category, Hebrews 9:14, offers a distinctive comment regarding Jesus' experience of the passion and his death: "how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience. . . ." Lane explains:

The fact that his offering was made *dia pneumatos aiôniou*, "through the eternal Spirit," implies that he had been divinely empowered and sustained in his office. The formulation does not occur elsewhere in the NT or early Christian literature, but it may be understood as a designation for the Holy Spirit. A reference to the Spirit is appropriate in a section under the influence of Isaiah, where the Servant of the Lord is qualified for his task by the Spirit of God. (Isa 42:1, 61:1)²⁶

These are the explicit references in the NT.²⁷ Now we turn to implicit references to Jesus and the Holy Spirit.²⁸

²⁶ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47B (Dallas: Word, 1991), 240.

²⁷ Two other passages mention Jesus and the Spirit that seem to relate to his resurrection, but there are challenges in interpretation, so these will be passed over but noted here, 1 Tim. 3:16 and 1 Pet. 3:18.

²⁸ For a recent and fairly comprehensive treatment on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, see Graham Cole, *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007).

Dependence on the Spirit—Implicit

1. Implicit Evidence from Jesus' Own Words. In the Gospels and early in Acts, Jesus makes claims about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Can we infer that these claims are based on his own relational dependence on the Spirit? In John 7: 37–38, Jesus cries out in a loud voice, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘*Out of his hear will flow rivers of living water*’” (italics added). Verse 39 identifies the Spirit as Jesus point of reference.

Another teaching is that the Spirit would help believers in tight spots. “And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what are to say, but say whatever is given you in htat hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit” (Mark 13:11).²⁹ I. Howard Marshall comments that “the Spirit gives guidance regarding both the general form of a speech and the actual content.”³⁰ It is likely that this particular teaching was based on Jesus' own experience (e.g., Acts 1:2). Willard comments, “A major point of this book is that the still small voice—or the interior or inner voice, as it is also called—is the preferred and most valuable form of individualized communication for God's purposes. God usually addresses individually those who walk with him in a mature, personal relationship using this inner voice, proclaiming and showing forth the reality of the kingdom of God” (*Hearing God*, 89).

Jesus' reference to the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31–32, Luke 12:10) indicates how important Jesus viewed the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Donald Hagner explains:

Given Matthew's Christological interests and the unique and central position held by Jesus throughout the Gospel, one may understandably be surprised that Matthew has not said the reverse of what stands in the text, i.e., that blasphemy against the Spirit is forgivable but not that against the Son of Man. The

²⁹ In Luke 12:15, describing the same context, it is Jesus himself who gives the wisdom. Related passages mentioning the Holy Spirit as the source: Matt. 10:19–20 and Luke 12:11–12. The critique is rehearsing some kind of response to officials solely on our own without the aid of the Spirit (so, I. H. Marshall, *Commentary on Luke* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978], 768).

³⁰ I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 520. For example, see Luke 2:26 and Acts 16:6 for cases of believers listening to the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 2:12–13).

gravity of the blasphemy against the Spirit, however, depends upon the Holy Spirit as the fundamental dynamic that stands behind and makes possible the entire messianic ministry of Jesus itself. . . . The failure to understand Jesus is yet forgivable but not the outright rejection of the saving power of God through the Spirit exhibited in the direct overthrow of the kingdom of Satan.³¹

Finally, a saying that may be the most telling of Jesus' relation to the Spirit is "The Spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41; Mark 14:38). The common view of Jesus' statement to the three sleeping disciples in Gethsemane is about the continuing internal struggle within human nature, between the human spirit against the weak physical body. If this were so, Jesus' preceding words ("Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial") would then be a challenge to muster more human effort to override their bodily weakness so they could pray.

Another interpretation sees the contrast as one between relying on divine power of the Holy "Spirit," rather than solely relying on human resources ("flesh"), which can never stand alone against the assaults of Satan. Jesus made similar contrasts between the divine sphere and human sphere elsewhere (John 3:6, 6:63), which have OT precedent in Isaiah 31:1, 3 contrasting an Egyptian alliance ("flesh") against relying on the Lord God ("Spirit"; see also Psa. 51:11–12). Is not Jesus giving the three disciples the secret to his own victory in the garden? William Lane comments on Mark 14:38, "Spiritual wakefulness and prayer in full dependence upon divine help provide the only adequate preparation for crisis. . . . Jesus prepared for his own intense trial through vigilance and prayer, and thus gave to the disciples and to the Church the model for the proper resistance of eschatological temptation."³² Jesus' comment here furnishes a fairly clear inference of his own dependence on the Holy Spirit and its implications as a teaching for all believers for all times.³³

³¹ Donald Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33A (Dallas: Word, 1993), 348.

³² William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 520–21.

³³ Hawthorne groups a number of additional implicit references to Jesus and the Spirit, (*The Presence*, 115): (a) Acting with authority (*exousia*): Mark 1:22/Matt. 7:29/Luke 4:32; Mark 1:27/Luke 4:36; Mark 2:10/Matt. 9:6/Luke 4:36; Mark 2:12/Matt. 9:6/Luke 5:24; Mark 11:29–30,

2. Implicit Evidence from the Gospel Writers and Acts. James Dunn suggests a parallel between John the Baptist and Jesus implying that if John, the Forerunner was filled by the Spirit from birth (Luke 1:15, 17) would it not be correct to imply that this was the case for Jesus, the Spirit-Anointed One, whose very birth was miraculously accomplished by the Spirit (Matt. 1:20, Luke 1:35). It is quite probable, though not certain, that Luke means us to understand that Jesus was every bit as full of the Holy Spirit as John was (1:15), and that Jesus' growth in wisdom and grace was due to his possession of the Spirit (2.40, 52); the link between the Spirit and divine sonship (and filial consciousness) would also be a pointer in this direction (1.35; 2.49; 3.22; cf. Rom 8.15–16; Gal 4.6).³⁴

The important event of Jesus' baptism and commissioning is a full Trinitarian event, with the Spirit resting on Jesus (Matt. 3:16, Mark 1:10, Luke 3:22).

There are also some key references using the term "power" and indicating Jesus as an agent of God's power. Luke 4:14 specifically makes the connection between the Holy Spirit and power: "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit." In some verses, only the term "power" is used, for example Luke 5:17: "And the power of the Lord was with him to heal" (see also Luke 6:19, 8:46, Mark 5:30; comments by the crowd, Matt. 14:12, Luke 4:36). Nolland explains

The reference to "power" (*dynamis*) [in Luke 5:17] links back to [Luke] 4:14 and prepares the way for the coming references to tangible power proceeding from Jesus (6:19, 8:44 [8:46]): the power that flows out of Jesus and brings healing is the power of God himself . . . It is more likely that Luke is continuing to clarify what it means for Jesus to have become through the descent

33/Matt. 21:23–34, 27/Luke 20: 2, 8; (b) Being perceived by the people as a prophet: Mark 6:15–16/Luke 9:8–9; Mark 8:28/Matt. 16:14/Luke 9:19; Mark 14:65/Matt. 26:68; see also Matt. 21:11, 46; Luke 7:16, 39, 24:19; (c) Perceiving himself as a prophet [and also more than a prophet]: Mark 6:4/Matt. 13:57/Luke 4:24; 13:33; cf. Matt. 23:31–38; Luke 11:47–51.

³⁴ James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Spirit* (London: SCM, 1970), 24. See also Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts in the New Testament and Church Today* (Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 1996), 25: "If the Baptist's own experience of the Spirit was itself an eschatological novum, Jesus' surpasses it. Gerd Schneider explains: 'Jesus is not merely filled with the Spirit, like John, rather his very being is attributed to the Spirit.'"

of the Spirit the repository of the power of God (3:22; 4:1, 14, 18–19; 6:19; 8:44).³⁵

Mark 5:30 clues us in to Jesus thoughts after the woman with the hemorrhage touched him: “Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, ‘Who touched my clothes?’” (also, Luke 8:46). Lane notes:

Jesus possesses the power of God as the representative of the Father. Nevertheless, the Father remains in control of his own power. The healing of the woman occurred through God’s free and gracious decision to bestow upon her the power that was active in Jesus. By an act of sovereign will God [the Father or the Spirit?] determined to honor the woman’s faith in spite of the fact that it was tinged with ideas which bordered on magic.³⁶

Finally, Acts 10:38, mentioned earlier in the chapter, makes the comment “how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power.” Furthermore, is not Jesus’ familiar challenge to the disciples before his ascension an experience he also had of the Spirit at his baptism? “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8).

Jesus Exercised Faith/Trust in God—Explicit

Having looked at dependence on the Father, and dependence on the Spirit, we now look at the third category of evidence to be explored. We learn that Jesus himself expressed faith and trust in God during his earthly sojourn by examining first explicit and then implicit references.

That Jesus experienced his own faith in God did not cross the minds of some translators of Hebrews 12:2, so they inserted an “our” in the text where there is none in the Greek manuscripts: “looking to Jesus the founder and perfecter of *our* faith” (italics added). We can trace that view at least as far back as Aquinas, who believed Jesus had the full beatific vision of God in the cradle as a new infant, eliminating any need for faith in God. Gerald O’Collins notes:

³⁵ John Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 35A (Dallas: Word, 1989), 234.

³⁶ Lane, *Mark*, 192–93.

Aquinas and the subsequent Catholic theological tradition held that in his human mind Jesus enjoyed the beatific vision and hence lived by sight, not by faith. Aquinas expressed classically this thesis: “When the divine reality is not hidden from sight, there is no point in faith. From the first moment of his conception Christ had the full vision of God in his essence . . . Therefore he could not have had faith” (*Summa Theologiae*, 3a. 7. 3 resp.).³⁷

Commentators now approach Hebrews 12:2 with fresh eyes. William Lane explains Hebrews 12:2: “Fixing our eyes on Jesus the founder and perfecter of faith”:

The poignant description as a whole points to Jesus as the perfect embodiment of faith, who exercised faith heroically. By bringing faith to complete expression, he enabled others to follow his example. The phrase reiterates and makes explicit what was affirmed with a quotation from Scripture in [Hebrews] 2:13, that Jesus in his earthly life was the perfect exemplar of trust in God.³⁸

Donald Hagner adds, “[Jesus] is not only the basis, means, and fulfillment of faith, but in his life he also exemplifies the same principle of faith that we saw in the paragons of [Hebrews] chapter 11.”³⁹

Jesus Exercised Faith/Trust in God—Implicit

1. Implicit Evidence from Jesus’ Own Words. In the Gospel account of the healing of the demonized son, some commentators suggest that Jesus’ reply to the father’s request in Mark 9:23 is both a challenge to the father, and also a testimony of his own life of faith, “And Jesus said to him, ‘If you can!’ All things are possible for the one who believes.” Sharyn Dowd explains, “Jesus is not merely an example to be imitated, but a leader to be followed. It is likely, then, that ‘the one who believes’ in 9:23 is deliberately

³⁷ Cited by Gerald O’Collins, *Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1995), 254–55.

³⁸ Lane, *Hebrews*, 412.

³⁹ Donald Hagner, *Hebrews*, NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 212.

ambiguous. Jesus has faith and he calls the father to have faith.”⁴⁰ O’Collins agrees, “[Jesus] speaks about faith as an insider, one who knows personally what the life of faith is and wants to share it with others (see 2 Cor. 4:13).”⁴¹

If Jesus was such an insider as a man of faith himself, then perhaps when he criticizes the disciples for their lack of faith (e.g., Matt. 6:30 [cf. Luke 12:28], 8:26, 14:31, 16:8, 17:20; *oligopistoi* “little faiths”), he is actually speaking as one who experientially knows what he is talking about. Ian Wallis notes, “The disciples may have been ineffectual . . . owing to their *oligopistia* [“little faith”], but Jesus was successful because he demonstrated that faith . . . a faith which all who intend to fulfill Christ’s commission must demonstrate.”⁴² Perhaps from his own early developmental experience of faith and trust in God Jesus learned that even small trust in God can accomplish great things, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can . . .” (Matt. 17:20, Luke 17:6, cf. Mark 11:12, 1 Cor. 13:2).

2. Implicit Evidence from Paul’s Epistles. On the topic of Jesus’ faith, possible support also comes from a reconsideration of how the Greek phrase *pistis Christou* should be translated. The phrase appears seven times in Paul’s letters (Rom. 3:22, 26, Gal. 2:16 [2x], 2:20, 3:22; Eph. 3:12, and Phil. 3:9), as well as in Acts 3:16 and Revelation 14:12. The traditional translation has been as an *objective* genitive (“faith *in* Christ”). Note that there is general agreement that believers must place their faith *in* Jesus, as taught in other NT passages (e.g., John 3:16, Acts 20:21, Col. 1:4, 1 John 3:23). The debate concerns whether the genitive noun (Jesus, or Son of God) is either *objective* or *subjective*. More commentators are recognizing the legitimacy of the phrase as a *subjective* genitive—that is, “faith [or faithfulness] *of* Jesus,” that Jesus himself experienced faith in God.⁴³ In *Renovation of the Heart*,

⁴⁰ Sharyn Dowd, *Prayer, Power, and the Problem of Suffering: Mark 11:22–25 in the Context of Markan Theology*, SBLDS 105 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 111.

⁴¹ O’Collins, *Christology*, 261.

⁴² Ian Wallis, *The Faith of Jesus Christ in Early Christian Traditions*, SNTS 84 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 36.

⁴³ For a summary of the grammatical options, see Daniel Wallace, *An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 115–16. For further treatment on this important issue, see Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001). Compare also the discussions of Romans 3:22–26 by Douglas Moo, who opts for the objective genitive view (“in Christ”), and Richard Hays, who opts for the subjective genitive view (“of Christ”). Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 224–43; Richard Hays, “Pistis in Romans 3:25: Neglected Evidence for the ‘Faithfulness of Christ?’” *New Testament Studies* 39 (1993): 478–80.

Willard quotes Galatians 2:20 with a subjective genitive “by the faith of the Son of God” (143). Wallis concludes his monograph on the faith of Jesus:

It is the conviction of the present author that interest in Jesus’ faith was an unfortunate and unnecessary casualty of early Christological controversy, in which its significance was determined more in terms of what it conceded to rival positions rather than of what it contributed to our knowledge of God and humanity of Jesus Christ. . . . Certainly, Jesus’ faith does seem to provide a point of departure for Christology which is rooted in common human experience and which explores his theological significance through reflection upon his human being in relation to God.⁴⁴

The explicit and implicit biblical data offer sufficient cumulative evidence of Jesus’ authentic human experience, as he relied on divine resources to live a supernaturally empowered lifestyle. He thus offers to believers a genuine example in his common life to us. But is Jesus only like us, just human? To that issue we turn next.

Differences between Jesus and Us: Potential Objections

Jesus shares a common humanity with us since believers, having been regenerated, now share the same human nature as Jesus does and as Adam and Eve did at creation. Let us consider some differences.

Uniqueness of Jesus and the Spirit

Is the Holy Spirit’s ministry unique to Jesus as the Anointed One/Messiah, or does the Holy Spirit also empower Jesus to live his earthly life in a manner similar to how the Spirit works with believers as well? Although the same Spirit that indwelt Jesus indwells all believers, John 3:34 indicates that Jesus had a greater measure of the Spirit. This may have been due to Jesus’ unique role as the divine-human Messiah that required the full measure of the Spirit’s ministry (John 3:36). Or, this greater measure may also have been the consequence of Jesus’ complete dependence on the Father and his life of holiness, which permitted a full measure of the Spirit in Jesus’ life and

⁴⁴ Wallis, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 221.

ministry. Sadly, our faith and life in holiness are limited, being hindered by doubt and unbelief as we are still in the process of being conformed to the image of the Son. Our honest prayer can be that of the man in Mark 9: “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24). Jesus teaches that it is possible to grow in greater dependence on God so we can emulate more and more of his life and ministry (e.g., Mark 11: 22–25; John 13:12–17, 14:12–14).

Supernatural Elements in Jesus’ Life

Are not the supernatural elements of Jesus’ life sourced in his own divine power? Note that most of the supernaturally-oriented activities of Jesus were not unique to him alone, but were also performed by “mere” humans, which supplies additional evidence for the dependency proposal.

(1) **Miracles.**⁴⁵ Both the OT and NT record miracles done by mere humans—not in their own human power, but sourced in the power of God, that were similar to those Jesus performed, for example: (a) raising the dead (2 Kings 4:8–37; Acts 9:36–42), (b) curing a leper (2 Kings 5:1–15), (c) healing the lame (Acts 3:1–10), (d) making an axe head float on water (2 Kings 6:4–7), (e) multiplying food (2 Kings 4:42–44), (f) walking on water for a brief time (Matt. 14:28–30), and (g) healing the sick and casting out demons by means of Paul’s handkerchief and clothes (cf. Acts 19:11–12).

(2) **Jesus’ knowledge.** How did Jesus convey God’s authoritative message and have knowledge of the thoughts of others (e.g., Matt. 12:25, Luke 11:17; Luke 6:8)? Daniel reported and interpreted the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2:1–49), and Peter knew the secret sin of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11).

(3) **Jesus’ temptability and impeccability (sinlessness).** Jesus is human, but also uniquely divine. Scripture explicitly teaches that Jesus was tempted (didactic material: Heb. 2:18, 4:15; life examples narrated in the Gospels, e.g., Matt. 4:1–11, 16:23, 26:38–46). Yet James teaches that God cannot be

⁴⁵ Oliver Crisp’s recent insightful studies in Christology are worth consulting. Oliver Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2007), 25, conveys the scholarly consensus in labeling the view that Jesus performed his miracles by the power of the Spirit—the view held by John Owen and what is being presented in this chapter—as the “non-conventional view on this matter.” See also Crisp, *God Incarnate: Explorations in Christology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2009).

tempted by evil (James 1:13). The teaching about Jesus' sinlessness claims that either he *could* not sin (or that he *would* not sin; Scripture only explicitly teaches that Jesus *did* not sin).

Bruce Ware offers a helpful analogy to clarify that Jesus did not rely on his divine powers to resist temptation and be sinless.⁴⁶ Imagine a man who wishes to swim across the English Channel from England to France. After much training, he hires a boat to go alongside to rescue him in case he is overcome with weariness or cramps. Being nearby, the crew in the boat would not permit him to drown. On the day of the swim, he launches out, perseveres against the cold water, the waves, the weather, and triumphantly reaches the other shore. So we ask: Why *could* the swimmer not have drowned? Because of the boat. But why *did* the swimmer not drown? Because he swam and finished his course. Accordingly, why *could* Jesus not have sinned? Because of his deity. But why did Jesus not sin? Because he resisted the temptations in his humanity, relying on God's powerful grace. The answers to these two questions must be kept distinct.

Yet, we still need to give some explanation for Jesus' inner psychological orientation and motivation. That Jesus fought against temptation is obvious, particularly in Gethsemane (even sweating blood, Luke 22:44; Heb. 12:4). No matter which incarnational model one holds, all must address this seeming paradox: Jesus could not sin, yet Jesus felt the genuine struggle of being tempted. (I do not think anyone would view the struggle in Gethsemane as just an amazing dramatic performance worthy of an Academy Award.) If Jesus knew he was God, which he did, why did he need to struggle against temptations? Resolving the temptability issue requires more space than can be allotted here, but suffice it to suggest one possible resolution. We can affirm that Jesus could not actually sin—that it was not a *metaphysical* possibility—if we also can affirm that it was an *epistemic* possibility.⁴⁷ That is, within Jesus' own understanding and perception

⁴⁶ Bruce Ware, "The Man Christ Jesus," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53, no. 1 (March 2010): 5–18. Ware presented his affirmation of Jesus' dependence on the Father and the Spirit in "Christ's Atonement: A Work of the Trinity," in *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective: An Introductory Christology*, edited by Fred Sanders and Klaus Issler (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2007), 156–88. For a helpful historical study of issues related to Jesus' temptation and impeccability, see John McKinley, *Tempted for Us: Theological Models and the Practical Relevance of Christ's Impeccability and Temptation* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2009).

⁴⁷ See Thomas Morris *The Logic of God Incarnate* (1986; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 147–48: "We have said that it seems to be a conceptual truth that, in some

of reality during his state of humiliation, it could be inferred that Jesus knew he was God but that he was *not certain* whether, as the theanthropic person (the God-man), it might be possible for him to sin. He could have inferred that as God, he could not sin. But the factor of also being human may have led to some uncertainty about that deduction.

Thus Jesus, with some uncertainty, chose to face the temptations as if he might be able to sin. Armchair theologians down through church history have wrestled with this issue and have had some disagreement about whether Jesus could have sinned or not, though the most common evangelical view is that Jesus could not have sinned. One could imagine that the Holy Spirit, his divine Tutor, may never have offered a definitive response to Jesus' question on that particular theological matter.⁴⁸ And Jesus did not have these learned tomes we have today to ponder the matter. Thus he struggled to resist temptation.

Furthermore, due to his formed heart of holiness, Jesus was much more painfully aware of the evil attacking him than we are. And he resisted every temptation, requiring greater intentionality in effort and reliance on divine help; believers are usually more clueless and less intentional (e.g., Heb. 12:3-4).

(4) Jesus' sinless life. Was this *solely* the result of his deity, or is it possible for a human person to live without sinning? First, human nature is not essentially corrupt or sinful (e.g., Gen. 1:31). Sinful propensities are a feature added on since the Fall. For a brief period of time Adam and Eve lived without sinning. Also, the Bible promises that all believers in the future eternal state, although still being human, will live continuously without sin (Rom. 8:17, 28-30; 1 Cor. 15: 50-57; Rev. 21:4, 27), sustained by the indwelling Spirit who indwells us forever (John 14:16). Being regenerated,

sense, temptation requires the possibility of sinning. On reflection, we can see that it is the *epistemic* possibility of sinning rather than a broadly logical, or metaphysical, or even physical possibility that is conceptually linked to temptation. . . . Jesus could be tempted to sin just in case it was epistemically possible for him that he sin."

⁴⁸One important factor that may have contributed to Jesus being able to live fully in his humanity without having to run personal interference to restrain his divine attributes (especially omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence) was that the Holy Spirit, who indwelled and filled Jesus, acted as the dynamic "firewall" to Jesus' divine mind so that his divine knowledge remained dormant in Jesus' "subconscious" mind, and so that other aspects of Jesus' infinite divine nature could not encroach on his finite human nature. Thus, the Holy Spirit played a key active role to help sustain certain aspects of Jesus' hypostatic union during the challenging earthly phase of his first coming.

believers now have a new heart (Ezek. 36: 25–27) and have been freed from the power of sin (Rom. 6: 6–7, 11–12, 18). Yet believers take with them into their new life in God’s family all of their sinful habits and propensities, and sadly we may continue to maintain and learn new sin patterns even as Christians. But we are commanded to walk in Christlike ways through the power of God’s grace working in us—“ought” implies “can” in God’s grace. Jesus demonstrated the possibility for regenerated humans to live sinlessly, becoming another “Adam” of a new God-oriented human race (1 Cor. 15:45–49).

Jesus’ life makes the point that living sinlessly is *theoretically* possible for regenerated humans through God’s power. The NT conveys an expectation and hope for believers that we can be transformed and sin less and less, as we rely on the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16; cf. 1 Cor. 10:13; 1 Pet. 2:21–23). Willard notes, “And that will enable us to walk increasingly in the wholeness, holiness, and power of the kingdom of the heavens. No one need live in spiritual and personal defeat. A life of victory over sin and circumstance is accessible to all” (*Renovation of the Heart*, 11).

Jesus’ Deity and Messianic Mission

One may wonder if a predominantly depended thesis is affirmed, is there any Scriptural evidence in the Gospels to be marshaled to support Jesus’ deity? Although the proposal affirms that each miracle is done by the power of the Spirit, the cumulative effect of the miracles, in combination with the other evidences, still point to Jesus’ deity as well as his unique and distinctive Messianic mission (e.g., Matt. 11:3–5). Various standard evidences can be cited for his deity, as mentioned at the beginning of the chapter: Jesus received worship (e.g., Matt. 28:9, 16; John 20:28), his self-claims (e.g., Matt. 22:42–45; John 8:58–59), use of “Lord” (e.g., Luke 2:11; John 20:28), and the testimony of Gospel writers (John 1:1, 18). Also, evidence of Jesus’ messianic mission as the Christ proves that Jesus is more than just a prophet (e.g., Luke 4:16–21; Matt. 16:16; Mark 10:45; Luke 4:41). Thus, despite the veiling of Jesus’ deity during the Incarnation, there is sufficient manifestation of his divine person that still shines through clearly, for, as Jesus teaches, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

Some Practical Implications

That Jesus lived an authentic human existence is a weighty matter to ponder, for our theology, and especially for our daily life. Let us consider some implications along two trajectories and then suggest a few exercises.

Living WITHIN Our Personal Human Context as Jesus Did

Busyness hinders a life with God. H. J. Cadbury notes, “We can hardly make a picture of Jesus’ life and that of his contemporaries that will be too casual for the facts.”⁴⁹ What challenges me is the seemingly casual manner of Jesus’ own life as portrayed in the Gospels, yet my own lifestyle is much too busy, as a recovering workaholic. Some Christian leaders tend toward over commitment of activities, which not only hinders our walk with God but also sets a bad example for others. Not only do we need physical rest, but our hearts also need space to listen to God. Willard suggests that solitude is the foundational spiritual discipline. “Solitude frees us. . . . The normal course of day-to-day human interactions locks us into patterns of feeling, thought, and action that are geared to a world set against God. Nothing but solitude can allow the development of freedom from the ingrained behaviors that hinder our integration into God’s order” (*The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 160).⁵⁰

Living BEYOND Our Human Limitations as Jesus Did

Yet Jesus also shows us the way to live a kingdom lifestyle, as Willard has pointed out. “The eternal life that begins with confidence in Jesus is a life in his present kingdom, now on earth and available to all” (*The Divine Conspiracy*, xvii). And a key divine resource is God the Holy Spirit who moves

within our souls and especially our minds. To present the person of Jesus and the reality of his kingdom. . . . After we receive the new life, the Spirit continues to move upon and within us to enable us to do the kinds of works Jesus did (through “gifts” of

⁴⁹ H. J. Cadbury, *The Peril of Modernising Jesus* (London: SPCK, 1962), 124, cited in Robert J. Banks, *The Tyranny of Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1983), 80.

⁵⁰ For helpful guidance on developing a conversational relationship with God, see Willard’s *Hearing God* and Klaus Issler, *Wasting Time with God: A Spirituality of Friendship with God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 151–82.

the Spirit) and to grow the kind of inward character that manifests itself in the “fruit” or outcome of the Spirit in our outward life: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, and similar traits of Christ (Gal 2:23–25). (*The Divine Conspiracy*, 348)

As Jesus depended on the divine resource of the Father and the Spirit, so must we if we wish to live a Jesus-like life.⁵¹

Suggested Exercises

Consider three exercises to ponder the key theme of Jesus’ dependence on God:

- #1. From Table 2 and in reference to the extended discussion, select a Scripture passage that intrigued you. Perhaps take some time to study the passage further in its context. Then meditate on the passage for a week or so and listen to the Spirit’s moving within.
- #2. If you wish an experiential presentation of Jesus’ authentic human experience, watch the movie, *Jesus*, starring Jeremy Sitso (1999, 174 minutes; a CBS mini-series). Invite some friends or family to join you. I was initially put off by the “humanness” of Jesus in the film. Yet I have since come to appreciate this as a distinctive contribution of the film. Not all in the film is theologically accurate—but no film can do that.
- #3. Refer to Dallas Willard’s *The Divine Conspiracy*, and read the section in which the invitation is posed: “I am learning from Jesus to live my life as if he would live my life if he were I” (283–85). Ponder, how would Jesus live my life, do my job, raise my kids, relate to my friends and family, if he were I? The point is not about how Jesus himself would work at a job like mine or be a parent. But, *if he were I*—being sensitive to my personality, to my talents and gifts, having had my experiential background with all the particular highs and lows—how would Jesus live my life, do my job, live within my life context? Dallas shares a bit of his own reflections on

⁵¹ As one means to stretch one’s God confidence, see J. P. Moreland and Klaus Issler, *In Search of a Confident Faith: Overcoming Barriers to Trust in God*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity), 2008.

being a professor at a research university. What insights come to mind to try out this week?⁵²

Jesus is my hero. Although fully God, the Second Person of the Trinity, he voluntarily came to earth, adding on a human nature, just like you and me, willing to limit his earthly life and experience all the joys and the sorrows as a human, just like you and me. Jesus lived *within* his personal human context. And, Jesus lived *beyond* his human limitations, predominantly relying on the divine resources of the Father and the Holy Spirit, to show us how we can live as he did. Jesus raises the bar for what is possible when one lives in dependence on divine resources. Willard clarifies, “But what we can do with [mechanical, electrical, or atomic power] is still very small compared to what we could do acting in union with God himself, who created and ultimately controls all other forces” (*The Divine Conspiracy*, 22–23).

One of my purposes has been to attend to the scholarly reluctance and the popular confusion about Jesus’ example. There is sufficient biblical evidence to support this claim that Jesus did predominantly live a human life, dependent on the divine resources of God.⁵³ Perhaps we can now leave such challenges behind and give greater practical attention to Willard’s challenge: How *would* Jesus live your life, with your personality, with your talents, within your life context, if he were you?

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you;
and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria,
and to the end of the earth.”*

(Acts 1:8)

⁵² Willard suggests that “if [Jesus] were to come today as he did then, he could carry out his mission through most any decent and useful occupation. . . . In other words, if he were come today he could very well do what you do” (*The Divine Conspiracy*, 14).

⁵³ The chapter is a revision of much of the material in “Jesus’ Example: Prototype of the Dependent, Spirit-Filled Life,” in *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective: An Introductory Christology*, edited by Fred Sanders and Klaus Issler (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2007), 189–225. The chapter will become part of a forthcoming book, tentatively titled, *Mind the Gap, Seven Formation Themes for Deeper Discipleship into Jesus*.

UNTIL CHRIST IS FORMED IN YOU

Dallas Willard and Spiritual Formation

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