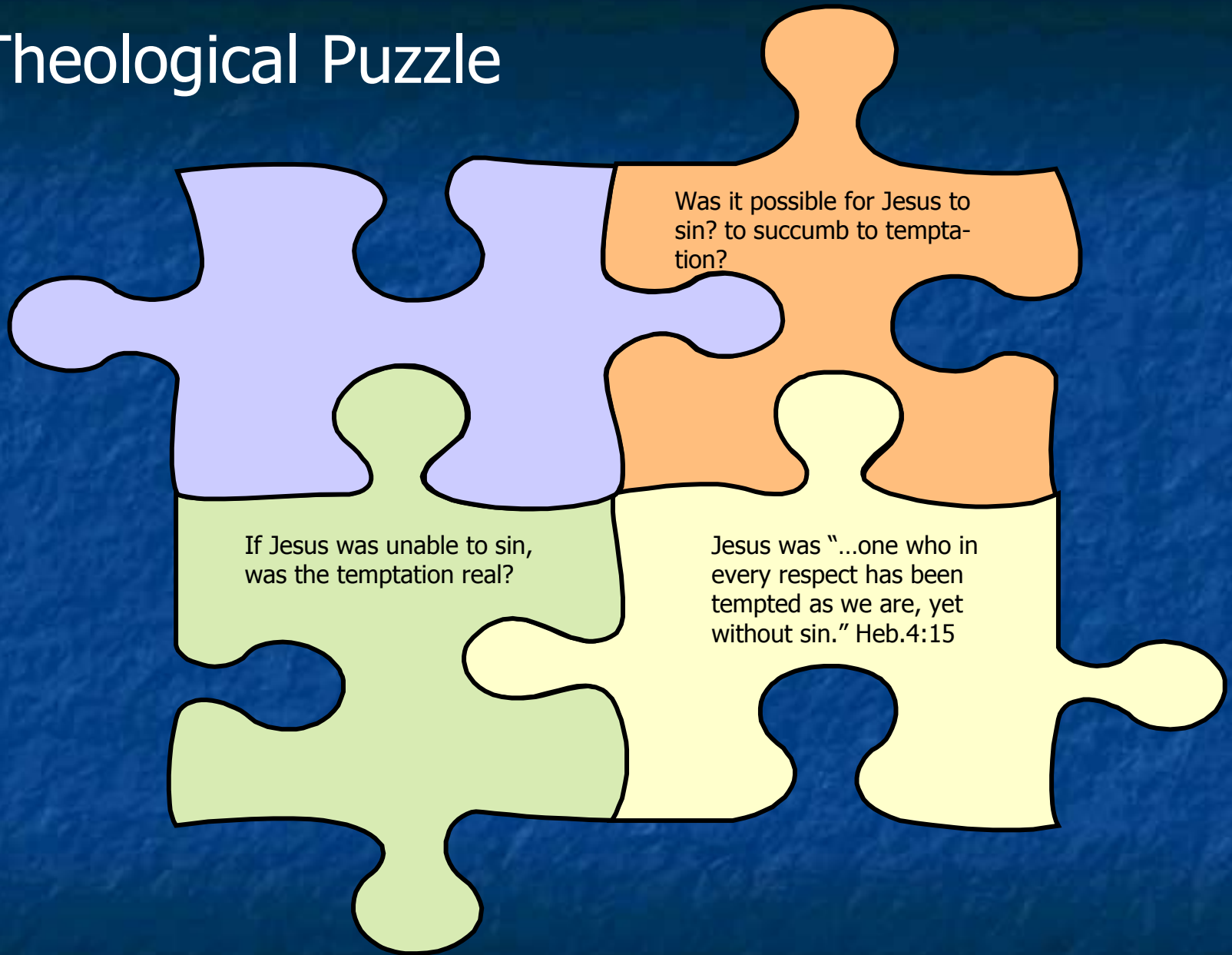


A Theological Puzzle



Was it possible for Jesus to sin? to succumb to temptation?

If Jesus was unable to sin, was the temptation real?

Jesus was "...one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." Heb.4:15

The New Testament Witness to the Sinlessness of Jesus

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

but not "like" we are; later explained.

Hebrews 9:14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

1 Peter 2:22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.

1 John 3:5 You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.

2 Corinthians 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

John 8:29 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 8:46 Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?

Was Jesus Free to Sin?

First we must understand the nature of "freedom" , that is, the freedom to make decisions or to choose.

One is free to choose when one has the ability to act.

Free choices reflect one's preferences or inclinations.

One freely chooses within the parameters of one's abilities and one's inclinations.

ability to act + inclination/desire = an act of free will

See Chart on next slide:

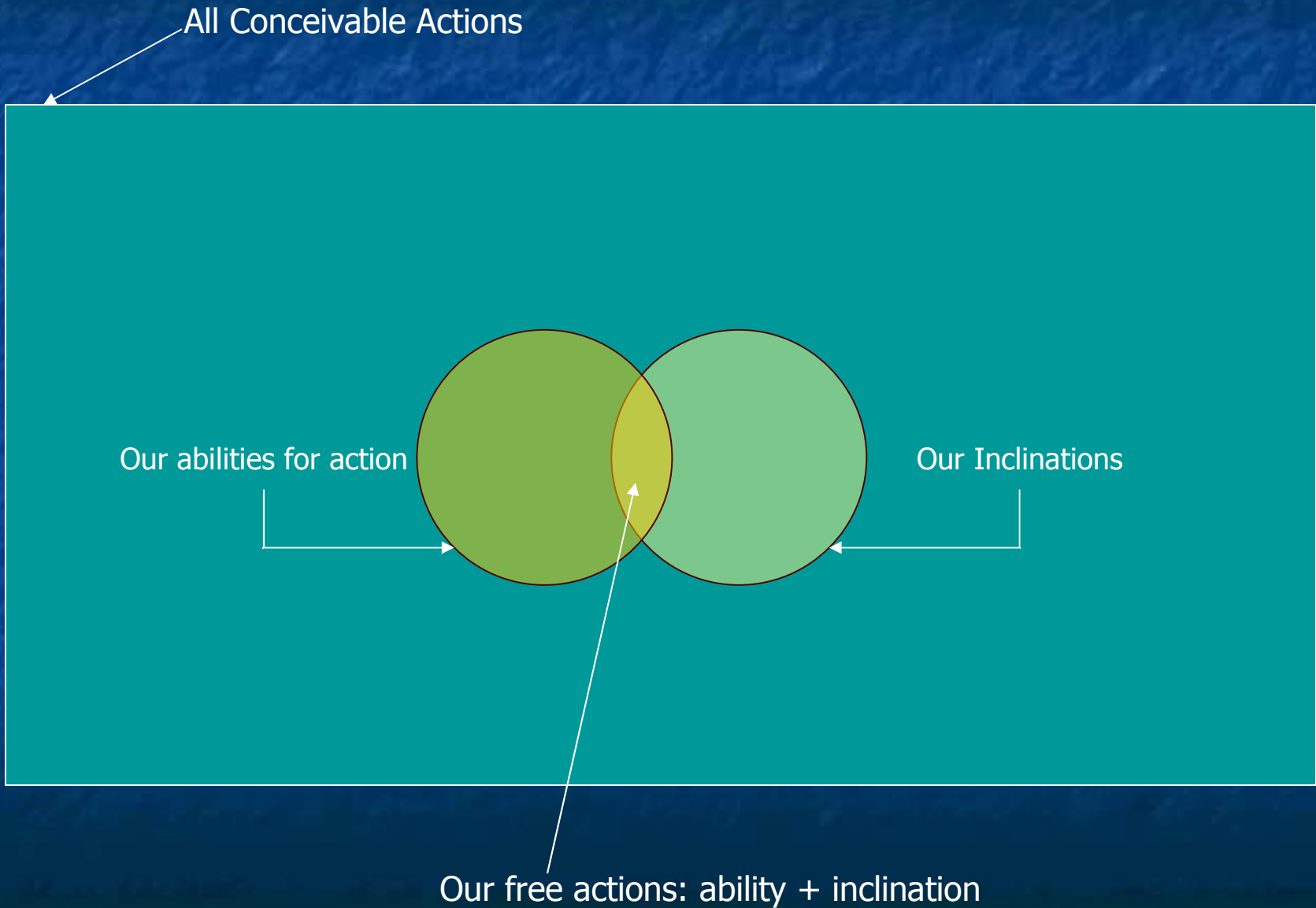
Out of all conceivable actions, we are able to perform only some, likewise, we are only inclined to perform some. Where these two come together or overlap, we have an expression of our free will.

One's moral responsibility extends only to one's ability to act freely.

Did Jesus have the ability to act freely to yield to the devil's temptation? Yes.

Did Jesus have the inclination to act freely to yield the devil's temptation? No.

The Two Factors in a Free Choice: Ability and Inclination

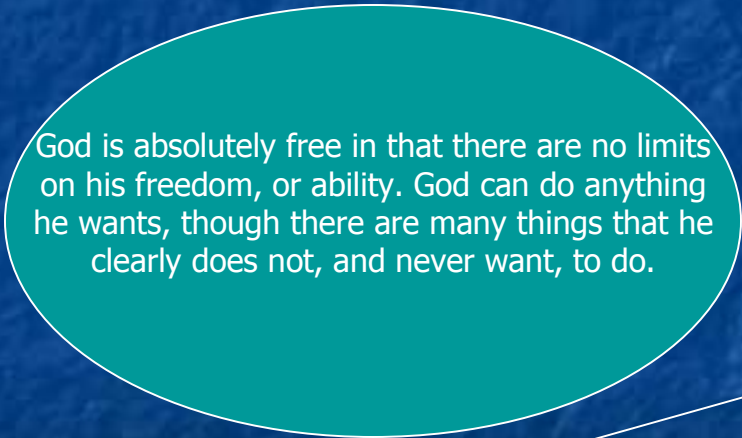


Was Jesus Free to Sin?

An Example:

Titus 1:2 "God never lies"

Heb.6:18 "God can not lie"



God is absolutely free in that there are no limits on his freedom, or ability. God can do anything he wants, though there are many things that he clearly does not, and never want, to do.

Really? Not even if he wanted to?

Job 42:2 "I know that you can do all things..."

Jer.32:17 "Nothing is too hard for you."

Matt.19:26 "with God all things are possible"

The point is not that He could not, but that He would not. It is a positive statement as the moral nature and character of God. God could not want to because of his nature/character

Was Jesus Free To Sin?

Consider the very human statement, "*I could never do _____*". Put anything that you would find morally reprehensible.

Next ask yourself the question, "Really? Not even if you wanted to?"

Illustration of George Washington and the cherry tree: "Father, I cannot tell a lie, I chopped down your cherry tree."

Now, consider Jesus, Son of God. He was surely tempted in the wilderness; it was not a sham or play. He was tempted even beyond our own temptation. Read Luke 22:44 and Heb. 12:4

We have every reason to think that the temptations that Jesus experienced were intense, and that he was free to yield. He had the ability to sin, but he did not have the inclination. While Jesus could have sinned, it was certain that he would not. The moral power within Jesus resulting from his anointing with God's Spirit and the Father-Son unity of love that existed between them gave Jesus the purity and strength of character that there was not an inclination to sin, to do anything contrary to the will of his Father.

The Temptations of Jesus and Ours

Jesus did not experience the enticement of temptation in the same manner that we do:

1. James 1:14 states, "But each person is tempted when s/he is lured and enticed by his/her own evil desire."
2. There is no evidence in the NT that Jesus was ever tempted in this way. In distinction from what we readily experience, Jesus was not drawn to sin by an evil desire inherent within his humanness. There was no "law of sin" within his nature. He was unlike us who have been "made captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members." Rom.7:23.
3. Satan had no hold or claim on Jesus: "I will no longer talk much with you for the ruler of this world is coming [Jesus is speaking of his coming passion], he has nothing at all in me." John 14:30. Jesus was free from actual sin and from inherent sin (his nature was neither fallen, nor corrupt).

Three Theological Points On the Sinlessness of Jesus

Our confession of the sinlessness of Jesus is more a theological statement than one based on historical observation.

The resurrection is God's vindication of Jesus' earthly life, as one that was untainted with sin. Jesus never did anything that was judged by God to be a sin, though certainly, others thought he did.

His sinlessness is not an affirmation of his deity. All believers will enjoy a perfect sinless existence in the eschatological community of God. Perfection is the destiny of all God's family. His sinlessness points toward his perfect humanity.

Since Jesus never sinned is he really human? or as human as we are? The better question, "Are we as human as Jesus?" Is sin part of the essence of being human? No.

There have only been 3 pure human beings. All of the rest of us are broken, corrupted versions of God's original design. Our humanity is not the standard by which we measure the humanity of Jesus, rather, his is the standard by which we measure ours. His is also the goal toward which we strive and which we shall someday share.

From Whence Are We Tempted?

1. To be tempted is not a sin; sin is committed by the consent of the will, whether the sin is in the mind or an overt act of the body.
2. Sin begins in our minds with thought/s which can be prompted by our fallen nature, the world around us, or maybe even by demonic suggestion.
3. If the thought is unchecked, it will move along a downward continuum to choice
repeated choice
to habit
to loss of control
to bondage
4. Ephesians 2:1-3 shows the interrelationship of the 3 sources of temptations for the Christian: *"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the daughters and sons of disobedience---among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."*

The Psychology of Temptation

Temptation comes to us in an appeal to our basic human drives; the deepest drives of the human psyche.

Two of our basic drives are autonomy and need to belong, the desire or drive to be independent, to be in charge of our life, assertiveness, to do our own thing and the desire/drive to part of something outside ourselves such as a partner, family, community. We want to be individual, but not separate.

Satan proposes things to us which appear to be good. His approach to Eve was an appeal to her drive for autonomy or independence. We are often tempted to an apparent good rather than to evident evil. This is still the "mother of temptations", to be as gods, deciding for ourselves what is right and wrong and in doing so reject divine authority.

Satan's strategy was successful with Eve.

The evil one approaches Eve with the suggestion that she could be as a god. What could be more autonomous than that? "To be as gods" is an exaggerated distortion of the basic human drive for independence/autonomy. Satan proposed an evil under guise of a good. And in the psy. of temptation we focus on the "good" that we, with our selective perception, see only what we want to see.

The Psychology of Temptation

- In addition there is self-deception which is a major contributor to temptation and to the success of temptation.

Probably one of the hardest tasks in our psychological or spiritual growth is to be honest with ourselves.

We are so good at kidding ourselves, rationalization, and projection. Often it is pride that keeps us from being honest with ourselves.

The Psychology of Sin

We can see in the serpent's [Satan] strategy with Eve the ordinary sequence in temptation:

Step #1 Resistance. Eve told the serpent "God said, You shall not eat the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, you shall not even touch it, lest you die."

Step #2 Hesitation. The serpent with his guile replied, "You certainly will not die. God knows well that at the moment you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods who know what is good and what is bad." Hesitation is our first mistake when being tempted.

Step #3 Weakening. "The woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom..."

Step #4 Surrender. "So she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate it."

"Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
as to be hated needs but to be seen,
yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
we first endure, then pity, then embrace." Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man*

Some Further Thoughts On the Psychology of Temptation

Temptation begins in the mind.

Resisting a particular temptation is more difficult when you think about what you are trying to resist. The thought becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The best approach is to refocus.

There is a reason behind the actions we take. When struggling with a temptation look into your soul and try to see the payoff for succumbing to the temptation.

React promptly, otherwise the thought gains a foothold in your mind.

Acknowledge your weakness to God, humble yourself and ask for his grace to get you through this testing.

Jesus' Temptations and Ours

The First Temptation Faced by Jesus: turn stones into bread. A lure to end of fast apart from God's time and provision; make his life as Messiah easier by using his power for self.

The Second Temptation: cast yourself off the temple, God will protect you. A lure to gain recognition as Messiah by displaying the spectacular and by imposing on God's love.

The Third Temptation: worship Satan. He could have a kingdom without going to the cross.

For us it may be the temptation to reduce the hard tasks of life (stones) by making our life easier (bread) even though we forfeit the spiritual growth that the hard task could provide.

For us it might be our desire or requests that we have some special spiritual phenomenon or some sign from God that He really does love us. Or put ourselves in harm's way and then expect God to rescue us from our foolishness.

For us it is the temptation of the short-cut. It is the spiritual version of a get-rich-quick scheme. We want to bypass the boredom of daily faithfulness. Jesus said, "Take up your cross daily and follow me." We get holy slowly!

Next Sunday, Feb.10,
Matt.4:12-25

What is the “kingdom of
heaven” that Jesus said was at
hand?