

# The Word was Made Flesh

In answering the following question, brother Randal Hess shares some excerpts from “The Word was Made Flesh” by Ralph Larson, highlighting the nature of Christ.

Can a person have the suggestions and promptings of sin, can he have a sinful nature, yet not be guilty of sin?

In The Word Was Made Flesh, Chapter 6, Definition of Terms: Usages Peculiar to Ellen G. White, Larson notes her "rigid adherence to dictionary definitions". He says his first observation is that she "uses the terms nature and flesh as if, in the context of Christological discussions, they are interchangeable." p. 15, then gives some examples.

He took upon Him our sinful nature. (Signs of the Times 7/30/1902)

He took upon Himself the likeness of sinful flesh (Signs of the Times 9/03/1902)

On p. 16 he says:

## Sinful

Dictionaries offer as a meaning of the suffix -ful, to have a tendency toward... The term sinful, according to this usage, does not refer to any act of sinning, much less to being full of sin, as some would read it. It means having a tendency toward sin, which accurately describes the flesh (nature) in which we fallen humans live. Ellen White consistently uses this term, sinful, to describe the flesh (nature) in which Christ made His earthly tabernacle." So she saw him as "having the same tendencies (natural propensities, not evil propensities) that our flesh (nature) has.

## Sinless

The dictionary defines the suffix -less as meaning without and incapable of. Thus a fearless person is incapable of feeling fear... Ellen White repeatedly affirms that Christ never sinned, but she **never** describes the human flesh (nature) that He assumed as *sinless*, lest she be understood as saying that His humanity was incapable of sinning. ... She believed that His temptations were real and that He could have sinned.

## Sinfulness

The dictionaries define the suffix -ness as meaning *a state of being*. This is far beyond *a tendency toward*. It must involve the actual practice of sinning. Ellen White applies this term to humans, but *never* to Christ, lest she be understood as saying that Christ sinned. Observe:

In him was no guile nor *sinfulness*. ... yet He took upon Him our *sinful nature*. (Signs of the Times 7/30/02)

... taking the nature but not the *sinfulness* of man. (Signs of the Times 5/29/01)

She did not equate sinful with *sinfulness*, as some would do today, and in this it must be conceded that she is following the dictionary.

## Sinlessness

Again, the dictionaries define the suffix *-ness* as meaning "a state of being."

Ellen White did not hesitate to apply this term to Christ, since she believed that He never sinned, and was never in the state of being a sinner. As she saw it, ***sinlessness in sinful nature*** was a real and practical possibility demonstrated by Christ and held before all Christians as a goal. Of some totally victorious Christians she predicts:

Everyone who by faith obeys God's commandments will reach the condition of **sinlessness** in which Adam lived before his transgression.' (*Signs of the Times* 7/23/02, p. 3, col. 1 (Bound Volumes p. 253))

It is apparent that these persons will not have lost their fallen, sinful natures. Their condition will be *sinlessness in sinful nature*. This association of ideas is seen again in a statement about Christ:

In taking man's nature in its fallen condition, Christ did not in the least participate in its sin... We should have no misgivings in regard to the perfect *sinlessness* of the human nature of Christ. (*Signs of the Times* 6/09/1898; Selected Messages vol. 1 p. 256)

Unlike Ellen White, and less careful about dictionary definitions than she was, some would equate *sinless* with *sinlessness* in their descriptions of Christ's human nature, apparently unconcerned that they are running the risk of being understood as describing His human nature as being incapable of sinning by their use of the word *sinless*. Ellen White did not do this. She applies the term *sinlessness* to the human nature of Christ, but not the term *sinless*. It is extremely unfortunate that some of her interpreters have not recognized this fact and stubbornly insist proposing that when she wrote *sinlessness* she actually meant *sinless*. I am proposing that she meant what she wrote, and wrote what she meant."