

Another guest post by Jeffrey Siker, raising a very hard question with some peculiar answers and a provocative suggestion.

Jesus and Sinlessness: Metaphor and Ontology, Blog 3

In the two previous posts I have shown how the tradition developed that Jesus was sinless, namely, retrospectively in light of resurrection faith. If Jesus was raised to divine stature at the right hand of God, then surely he must have been God's divine Son throughout his public ministry (even if hidden by a messianic secret), and also in his baptism and birth. Thus, the logic goes, he must have been perfect throughout his life. He could have no taint of sin. On this the earliest Christians generally came to agree, though they expressed this agreement in different ways.

Gnostic Christians like Valentinus in the second century associated sin with material existence, and bodily physicality. This led Valentinus to argue that Jesus only appeared to be a flesh and blood human being. In reality he was a spiritual being only. As a result, Valentinus argued that Jesus "ate and drank in a special way, without excreting his solids." Jesus was thus not corrupted by a physical body, which was the locus of sinful flesh. Clement of Alexandria agreed that Jesus did not need to eat, but argued that he did eat "so that his companions might not entertain a false notion about him," namely that he only appeared to be human.

Later Christian tradition ...

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