

Scripture tells us that Jesus was tempted in all points as we are (Heb. 4:15).

Yet we know He wasn't crippled or handicapped. He didn't live through old age. He wasn't forced into retirement and then forced to try to make ends meet on a pension.

How, then, can Jesus understand all that humans go through?

What about the myriad temptations and problems with which this modern world confronts us? Jesus didn't live in a society quite like this — far from it, in fact.

If we are to come boldly to God's throne of grace (verse 16), how can we be sure that Jesus understands what we feel and mean? After all, He is God — an immortal, almighty spirit being — we are mere flesh, and very weak. If Jesus has never experienced the exact sufferings that we do, how can He understand our personal needs?

Sure, we realize that Paul said most trials are common to all (I Cor. 10:13). And in Christian fellowship we are often surprised and comforted to find someone else who has gone through similar difficulties as ourselves.

Yet we each have experienced unique pains, trials and sufferings that we feel no one else can properly understand. And we may even wonder whether God Himself can. Is God able to really appreciate the depth of troubles we go through?

Peter tells us that Jesus suffered for us, leaving us an example (I Pet. 2:21). In what specific sufferings did Jesus lead the way? What confidence can we have that He does understand the personal traumas of each and every one of His people? Let's look at the facts.

Jesus was fully physical

First, we need to understand

Does Jesus REALLY Understand?

that Jesus was fully physical — He was as much a human being as any of us are. He "made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men" (Phil. 2:7). He was "found in appearance as a man" (verse 8).

Jesus was as fully capable of experiencing the entire gamut of emotions, physical sensations, pains and human needs as any of us are.

Isaiah was inspired to write that even Christ's appearance did not make Him stand out as especially attractive or desirable physically (Isa. 53:2).

Jesus experienced tiredness and, like any human, needed time to recuperate occasionally from shouldering the responsibilities He carried. He rested at the well of Samaria because He was physically weary (John 4:6). After hectic, busy times He would withdraw to areas of quiet solitude in order to recharge His batteries (Mark 6:31).

During the latter part of the first century a false teaching arose that Jesus had not, in fact, been fully physical — that He had not truly experienced what it was like to be a human being. The apostle John, in his first epistle, made several strong statements to counteract this heresy.

John testified of a Jesus whom "we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled" (I John 1:1). Later John warned those he was writing

to, "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God" (I John 4:2-3).

We today should not make the same mistake of believing that Christ was not fully human and thus could not understand our human feelings and experiences.

Lived in a corrupt society

We today live in a corrupt society that wallows in government inefficiency, social injustice and violent crime. Our lives are regulated by an oppressive system of myriad, and many times foolish, laws and regulations.

But Jesus lived in a similarly corrupt society. He knew the burdens of taxes and human laws and rules. Jesus lived in Judea under the occupation forces of the Romans. The Romans treated the populace as subjugated peoples and enforced harsh requirements.

One rule was that Jews could be commandeered to carry any Roman soldier's equipment for a mile. It is interesting to note that, in response to such an unfair regulation, Jesus encouraged Jews to go above and beyond and to be willing to carry such burdens two miles (Matt. 5:41).

Jesus also spoke of the repressive laws of the religious authorities of His day: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not according to their works; for they say, and do not do" (Matt. 23:2-3).

Problems with family, friends and other people

How many of our most serious problems as Christians involve members of our own families or close friends, or opposition from people we must constantly be around and try to get along with

— employers, fellow workers, neighbors, school officials? Well, Christ had to face similar difficulties.

Jesus was ahead of His time in relation to humanity in general and in relation to His own parents and family. When we become converted — start to live God's way of life instead of the way we have been living — former friends do not accept it (I Pet. 4:3-4). Imagine what it must have been like for the only perfect human being who ever lived!

Jesus' own brothers did not believe in Him and became frustrated at His refusal to publicly show His powers (John 7:3-5).

Jesus was criticized by the religious community for not having acceptable educational credentials (John 7:15). Because He came from Galilee and Nazareth, Jesus suffered snide put-downs about His heritage — "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" asked one man (John 1:46).

In the very hour of Jesus' greatest need, His closest friends deserted Him. In the garden of Gethsemane, His disciples fled when they saw that He would be arrested, leaving Him alone to face the religious authorities and soldiers. The next day many of the disciples were too frightened to be publicly seen near the stake and stood "afar off" (Luke 23:49, Authorized Version).

Suffered physical pain

Many of God's people today must suffer physically because of illnesses or accidents. But Christ understands the very depths of physical suffering as well.

The gospels reveal that in Jesus' last hours as a human, He was falsely accused, reviled, sworn at, spat upon, slapped in the face. He suffered one of the most brutal beatings ever administered and was then crucified, crucifixion being one of the most painful forms of death ever devised.

Notice Isaiah 52:14, speaking of Jesus: "Just as many were astonished at you, so His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons

of men." Jesus was barely recognizable as a human! Read also Isaiah 53:3-8, which speaks about how much Christ suffered.

Jesus did not, humanly speaking, want to suffer and die, any more than any one of us would want to. Humanly, He didn't want to face the physical pain of crucifixion and eventual death (Matt. 26:37-44). But He did, to pay the penalty of the sins of all mankind.

Yet Jesus' teaching was not to respond in kind to evil. He committed His cause to the righteous judge in heaven (I Pet. 2:21-23). His last words before He died expressed forgiveness for those who had caused the evil done to Him (literally, everyone else who has ever lived, including you and me!). Jesus saw His enemies as deceived humans who did not understand what they were doing (Luke 23:34).

Jesus is certainly qualified to understand our sufferings, but we might well ask whether *we* are qualified to understand *His*!

Perhaps there are other things Jesus might not have specifically experienced. For instance, He did not marry as a human. On the other hand, He was symbolically married to Israel.

And as Creator of all things (Eph. 3:9), He has down through time experienced great depths of emotions about what humans have done to other humans. He was "grieved in His heart" before the Flood (Gen. 6:6). We live in an age comparable to the time of Noah, and can be sure that Jesus likewise grieves today over the hurts and sufferings of this age.

If you can identify with some of these examples, then you can know that you do have a faithful High Priest who has walked this physical life ahead of you. He does know what it means to suffer. He is fully qualified to discuss your personal grief and sorrow with God the Father as your spiritual intercessor.

Pray boldly and confidently, knowing that with every hurt you suffer, Jesus is a high priest who hears, knows and truly understands how you feel! □