

ON A HILL TOO FAR AWAY - Fifteen Protestant Truths About the Death of God the Son - Part Two

Sunday, March 13th, 2016, 6:00 p.m. - Teaching #1869

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JESUS DIED ON THE CROSS TO LEARN OBEDIENCE BY THE THINGS HE SUFFERED AND COMPLETE THE OBEDIENCE THAT FULFILLS ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS

Hebrews 5:7-9 - "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. [8] Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. [9] And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him..."

Romans 5:16-19 - "And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. [17] For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. [18] Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. [19] For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."

Jesus never suffered to evoke our pity. So the question remains - perhaps left over from last week's teaching - *Is the suffering of Jesus pointless?* Is it merely the fact of Jesus' **death** that has theological significance? And the answer to those questions is **no**. The suffering of Jesus, both in His life and in His death matters to our Christian life today. There is deep, sturdy, precious, theological **meaning** and **accomplishment** in the suffering of Jesus. That suffering found its climax on the cross, but it had its beginnings in a Baby who couldn't find the comfort of a decent birthplace and a life that knew little but poverty, hard work, and later on, loneliness, rejection, and brutal agony.

Why this path of suffering? Why such a painful, bloody end to a perfect life? What was accomplished by the actual **suffering** of Jesus? I don't just mean His final **death**. I mean the agonizing path that **brought** Him to His death.

The Bible says we benefit two ways from the suffering of Jesus:

- 1) **JESUS LEARNED OBEDIENCE BY THE THINGS HE SUFFERED AND WAS MADE PERFECT AS THE AUTHOR OF OUR SALVATION**

Hebrews 5:8 - "Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered."

Hebrews 2:10 - "For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering."

The background for understanding these verses is important. The very same letter to the Hebrews makes clear that Jesus never committed any kind of sin - not ever - **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."

So whatever else those two verses about Jesus "**learning obedience**" and being made "**perfect**" mean, they don't mean there was ever a time when Jesus was guilty of any sin or moral impurity of any kind. In other words, Jesus didn't **learn** obedience the way **you and I** learn obedience. And He was never **made perfect** the way **you and I** are progressively made perfect.

Whenever you and I learn obedience it involves **unlearning** disobedience. We are, hopefully, being increasingly

made perfect as **imperfections** are cleansed in the blood of Jesus Christ. But Jesus never had to **unlearn** disobedience. He never had to have His own life **cleansed** from anything that was dirty or impure.

Then what exactly did Jesus **learn** and how did this **perfect** Him who was already morally perfect? Look carefully with me at these texts today because, in them, I have come to see truth that takes the suffering of Jesus (on the cross and before) and gives it **profound application for my life**.

Here's what Jesus **learned**. He learned in full measure the **cost** of obeying the will of God in a fallen world in a human body with a genuine human nature. Jesus had never experienced that. His will had always been perfectly joined with the will of the Father.

But that obedience had never **cost** Jesus anything. Before the Incarnation, Jesus had never been in an environment where there was **opposition** to the Father's will. And Jesus had never experienced the **limitations** of obeying the Father from the framework of a finite human experience. He had never once experienced **temptation**.

The pre-incarnate Son had never experienced the downward drag of life in a fallen world. He had never experienced the agony of Gethsemane - where the writer of Hebrews says He **"cried out with tears"** in a way never experienced before the agony of the cross. This is what Jesus **learned**. This is what was **new**. This was the **fresh learning curve** of the suffering of Christ as the **Man of Sorrows**. He became **"acquainted with grief"** in the way not possible in eternity past with the Father.

So, first of all, this is **how** Jesus **"learned obedience by the things He suffered."** He learned obedience under the conditions of our finite, human existence. He learned obedience to the Father's will on **our terms**. Later in this series we will study how this enabled Jesus to become a **sympathetic** High Priest instead of a **condemning** High Priest.

But what about the second issue? If this kind of obedience is what Jesus learned through His suffering, how did this obedience make Jesus **"perfect"**? - **Hebrews 2:10** - **"For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering."**

The perfection described here isn't **moral** perfection. Jesus wasn't perfected in the sense of being cleansed of **impurities**. Rather, the perfection described is the perfection of being **readied for a particular task - being made perfect (prepared) for a specific job**. The text makes the nature of this perfection clear. Jesus was made perfect as the **"author of eternal salvation"** through these sufferings.

Oh, there is a brilliant truth here for the discerning. Jesus' suffering made Him perfect as a **Savior**. His suffering made Him perfect as our **Redeemer**. That's because we need a Redeemer who was **one of us**. We need a Redeemer who is not ashamed to call us **"brothers"** (Hebrews 2:17). We need a Redeemer who has been where we've been - who saves us from **our** side as well as from **God's**. Remember the two important words from last Sunday's teaching time - **propitiation** and **expiation**.

Let me expand on this truth in the second point of this message:

2) **JESUS DIED ON THE CROSS TO COMPLETE THE OBEDIENCE THAT FULFILLS ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS**

We are unfolding the many **shades and levels of glory in the cross**. This point is **like** the first, but goes a step further. First, we saw that Jesus **learned obedience** by the things He suffered. He was **"made perfect" - prepared for His role to bring us salvation**. Now, secondly, we're seeing that Jesus **completed** the obedience that fulfills all righteousness.

Take time to ponder this priceless, life-giving truth:

Romans 5:19 - "For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."

The phrase to note is **"...so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."** Think of **two important "p" words - pardon and perfection.** Last week we began our study of the cross with the only place you really **can** begin. Jesus Christ bore the just wrath of Almighty God. This is not harsh, legalistic teaching. The love of the entire Trinity is involved. This is a beautiful teaching. **Jesus** bore the wrath of God in His death on the cross. **He** bore it instead of **me**. You only grasp God's mercy when you see the incredible, grace-filled beauty of that truth.

Jesus' **death** brought my **pardon**. But you and I both need more than just **pardon**. We need more than our **debt** canceled because we still aren't capable of moral perfection. **Our present is no more worthy of God's approval than our past.** What we need is real, solid, perfectly accomplished righteousness before God. And Jesus' **obedient life** brought my **perfection** before God.

Study this carefully. Make sure you see the **two transactions** that took place in Christ Jesus on your behalf. Jesus' **death** bore my **punishment**. Jesus' perfect **obedience to the law** was imputed as my **perfection**. Both are necessary if I am to have any standing before the throne of God.

There are **two reasons** it is not abominable for God to pronounce the ungodly justified. **First**, the death of Jesus on the cross paid the debt of my unrighteousness. **Second**, the perfect obedience of Christ provided the righteousness I needed but didn't have in myself. This is what the Scriptures mean when they say that the **"Through the obedience of the One (Christ) the many will be made righteous."**

Or, listen to the way Paul describes these **two** transactions in one verse: **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."**

There are **two mighty transactions** being finalized through both the **painful obedience** of Christ during His **life** and the **sacrificial death** of Christ on the cross. First, my sin and guilt are **imputed** to Christ Jesus in His death. He bears the just wrath of Almighty God on my behalf.

But there is more. Christ dying on my behalf only cancels my **debt**. And I need more than my debt canceled. I need to possess a perfect, accomplished, positive righteousness before the law of God. Christ lived a perfectly obedient life. He completely fulfilled the law of God in every way that I didn't. And **His perfect obedience before Father God counts. It counts on my behalf:**

Philippians 3:9 - "...and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith..."

That righteousness Paul described - that I receive through faith in Christ - isn't **mystical** righteousness. It isn't "make believe" righteousness. Father God doesn't have to **pretend** I'm holier than I am. The righteousness Father God sees in me was actually **produced** in Jesus Christ's obedient life right here on this earth. It's **real** righteousness. It was **hard-fought** righteousness. It was **hard-won** righteousness.

He accomplished it as a genuine human being. He accomplished it in the face of tremendous pain, suffering, rejection and opposition. Everyone **saw** the shining, holy, pure, perfect life of Jesus right here on this fallen earth, under the worst possible conditions. Jesus suffered for it in **this real, sinful world.**

And He did it perfectly. If Jesus merely died in my place, but didn't keep the law of God perfectly He died on that

cross for **His own** sin. I don't have perfect righteousness before God. And I **must** be perfectly righteous before God because God is perfectly just and never grades on a scale. Close isn't good enough.

Jesus' perfect righteousness, imputed to you and me through faith, is why there is now **"no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus...."** The Bible never says we are free of condemnation simply because God loves us. God **loves** the whole world, but that won't free it from condemnation.

You and I can stand free of condemnation in Christ for one reason only, Jesus **kept the law perfectly**. He **fulfilled all righteousness** in His obedience to the Father. That's the basis for my assurance. That's how I shut Satan's mouth when He condemns me on the basis of **my own** performance. I am clothed with the **perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ**.

O church, **behold the love of God in Christ** that both takes my guilt, granting **pardon**, and supplies Christ's righteousness, granting His **perfection!** Ponder this. The kind of righteousness I need before the law of God must be accomplished right here in this fallen world - where I live - not somewhere up in heaven. And that is the righteousness Jesus provides through His own perfect, painful, costly obedience right here in this fallen world - right where I live.

The whole Bible pointed to this perfect righteousness supplied in Christ Jesus. Think of the whole Old Testament sacrificial system. A perfect sacrifice had to be brought. The lamb had to be without blemish. The best cuts of meat had to be prepared. And with every sacrifice offered - as the pile of bloody carcasses piled higher and higher - each perfect sacrifice only served to remind more vividly of the **imperfections** of the one offering them!

All of these sacrifices pointed to the One who was to come - the One who would be truly spotless and holy throughout His whole life, and then right unto death itself. Only this sacrifice **provided** the righteousness we all lacked. This sacrifice **imputed** perfected righteousness to all who put trust in His loving provision.

How good is that! Magnify the full provision of the life and death of Jesus Christ. This is truth to stand in and truth to glory in for the rest of your days.