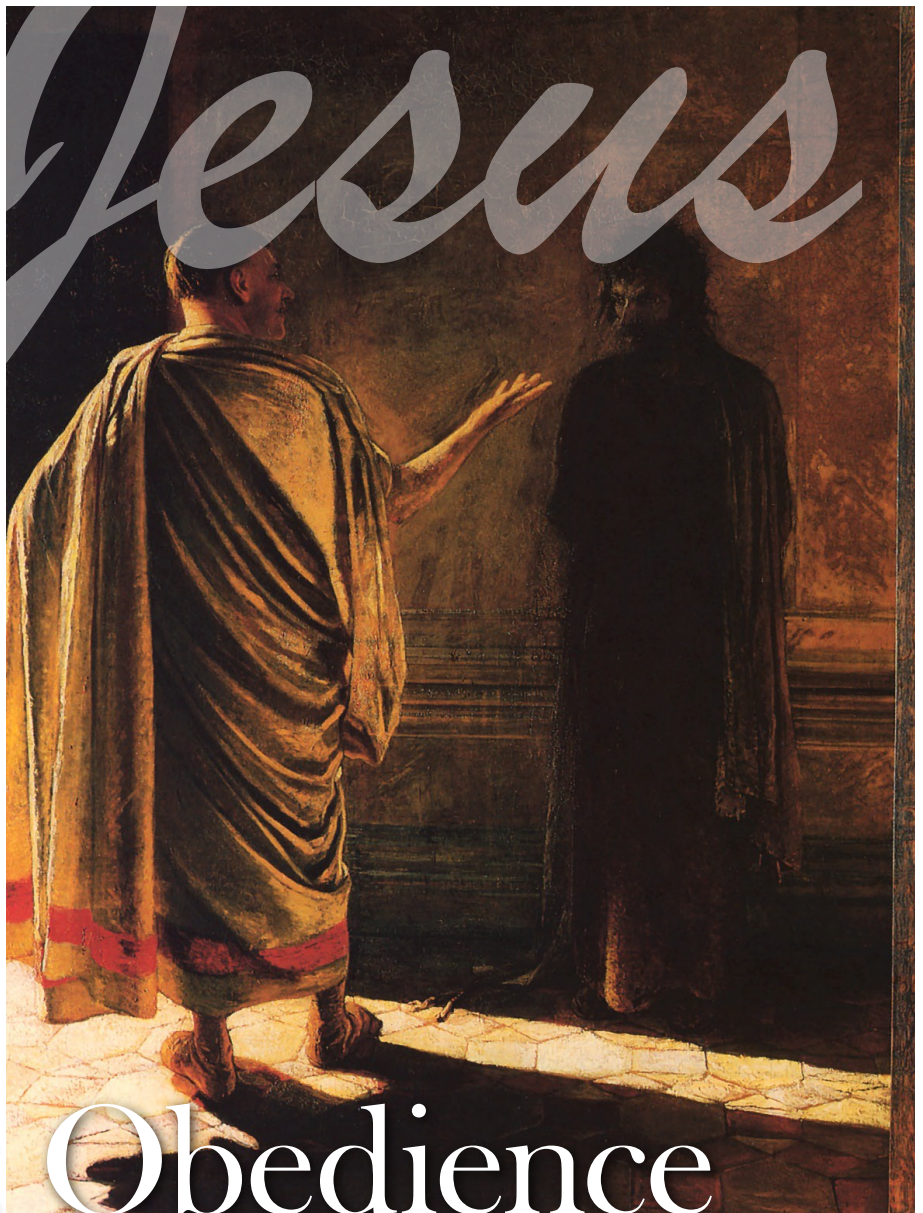


Though he was rich, as being God, equal in power and glory with the Father, yet he not only became man for us, but became poor also. At length he emptied himself, as it were, to ransom their souls by his sacrifice on the cross. From what riches, blessed Lord, to what poverty didst thou descend for our sakes! and to what riches hast thou advanced us through thy poverty! It is our happiness to be wholly at thy disposal.

Matthew Henry



Perfect Obedience

WHEN THE SON WAS STILL IN HEAVEN, STILL IN HIS PRE-INCARNATE STATE, He was not ready. When the Son became flesh, born of a virgin in lowly estate, He was not ready. When He passed through days of torment, fasting, and temptation in the wilderness He still was not ready. When He selected and trained up disciples to carry on His work He was not ready. When the rulers sought His capture and death, but He slipped away unharmed, He was not ready. But there came a day when events in heaven and on earth were aligned; a day when the unending tape measure of time reached its predetermined mark; a day when the man Jesus, God in flesh, was everything He needed to be—then, and only then, was He ready.



Process

For someone born and raised on the teaching that Jesus was sinless God in flesh, the statements of the writer to the Hebrews can, at first, sound an odd, discordant tone.

Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation,

being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 5:8-10

In human terms, if one has been “made perfect,” it implies that one was heretofore *not* perfect. Likewise, if one has had to “learn obedience,” there certainly must have been a time when one was *not* obedient, and had it to learn. But neither of these lamentable conditions could describe Christ Jesus, for though He dwelt, for a while, in flesh, He never ceased being perfect God.

We must constantly remind ourselves of Christ’s supernatural lineage. God, in His grace, sent His Son to experience what it was like to be made of fragile flesh, to suffer, to long for home, to be misunderstood and hated, and to die. The Son’s incarnation was real; it was as tangible and substantial as anything else on earth. It really, historically, happened. In none of this, however, did the Son lose even the smallest portion of His supernatural perfection—perfect as in whole, complete, beyond improvement. Jesus, in His thirty-plus years upon this earth, never ceased to be perfect God.

But, to put it in base human terms, He came to earth with a job to do. His assignment was not to sit in an invisible glass booth, observing the comings and goings of His human creation from a sterile environment. Rather, His assignment was to *dwelt with them*, to be one of them, to experience what they experience, to eat their food, to grow weary and require sleep, to become angry and melancholy and laugh at their jokes.

In Bethlehem, at the start of this experience, Jesus was “imperfect” at being a flesh-and-blood sacrifice for the sins of man. Beginning as a newborn, He would grow and mature and learn more about the joys and needs of His creation. It was also necessary for Him to suffer, as a part of the perfecting process.

And He said to them, “O foolish men

and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?”

Luke 24:25-26

Jesus would be “made perfect”—complete, accomplished, finished—over the course of His years on earth until, on the cross, He would confirm the completion of His assignment with a form of the same word rendered above “perfect.”

Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is **finished!**” And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.

John 19:30 (emphasis added)

Beyond Theory

Part of the Son’s process of perfection was for Him to “learn obedience.” But what did He “learn”?

Imagine, if you will, a savior who was only *willing* to suffer and die. “Sure, I’d be willing to do that. I can see that there is a need for a sacrifice. I could do that. You just let me know when, and I’ll put it right up there at the top of my Do List. You bet.”

Obedience is the process by which theory becomes act. If my father asks me to mow the lawn, I have not actually obeyed until my *willingness* to mow the lawn has become the *act* of mowing. I have not obeyed my father until the entire lawn has been mowed and the lawnmower is once again parked back in the garage. Repeatedly throughout my childhood, my mom would ask me to do something such as take out the trash, shake the rugs, or clean my room. In just about every case I would immediately answer in the affirmative, agreeing to do it. But often I would procrastinate until she would have to ask me again, or I would forget about it entirely. No matter what my good intention at first, if I didn’t follow through and complete

the task, I was being disobedient.

Jesus “learned” obedience by following through on the Father’s request that He suffer and die. The Father said, “Do this,” and Jesus was not just willing, but He willingly went through all the suffering—unto death—that was necessary for Him to become the one and final Savior for man.


Forgetting

At the same time that Jesus was learning obedience, He was also *teaching* obedience. For the entirety of His life on earth Jesus was showing us how obedience to the Father is done.

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Philippians 2:5-8

Jesus willingly emptied Himself of all privileges of deity. He emptied Himself of all deserved trappings of royalty. By all rights, He could have reigned exalted and supreme over every earthly king; with mere thought, He could have expunged the world of all evil, all injustice, all pain and death. Instead, He came as a servant, and took upon Himself the world’s evil, injustice, pain, and death. He forgot Himself in favor of the Father and man.

And He asks us to do the same. Jesus asks us to set aside the royal trappings we have in His name, our future as rulers by His side. He asks us to empty ourselves of privilege and pride, wealth and ease. He asks us to be—in His name—not lords, but servants; not kings, but serfs. He asks us to forget ourselves. 

IF MY RELATIONSHIP TO [THE LORD] IS THAT OF LOVE, I will do what He says without hesitation. If I hesitate, it is because I love someone I have placed in competition with Him, namely, myself. Jesus Christ will not force me to obey Him, but I must. And as soon as I obey Him, I fulfill my spiritual destiny. My personal life may be crowded with small, petty happenings, altogether insignificant. But if I obey Jesus Christ in the seemingly random circumstances of life, they become pinholes through which I see the face of God. Then, when I stand face to face with God, I will discover that through my obedience thousands were blessed. If I obey Jesus Christ, the redemption of God will flow through me to the lives of others, because behind the deed of obedience is the reality of Almighty God.

Oswald Chambers