



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)
Lesson 6.7.2.3 – The Doctrine of Jesus, Son of God, Messiah (Christology)

The Obedience of Jesus as Our High Priest

On *Yom Kippur* (the Great Day of Atonement) the high priest was required to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat (the covering of the ark of the covenant) from two sin offerings: one for himself and one for the people. This was necessary because he himself was a sinner. But Jesus Christ, our High Priest, had to offer to God the blood of only one offering, because He was without sin. Jesus' blood was the blood of the holy Son of God, which **"cleanses us from all sin"** (1 John 1:7).

To be the perfect sacrifice, Jesus had to be perfectly obedient in His earthly life to the will of His Father. And indeed, He was obedient, **"obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross"** (Philippians 2:8). **"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous"** (Romans 5:19).

It was the Father's will to save sinners through the obedient sacrifice of His Son, and His Son was perfectly willing to be obedient to His Father's will in every way, even though that obedience included His suffering and death as One being punished for the sin of the world. In the Old Testament David described in advance the obedience of the Christ in these words: **"Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of Me. I delight to do Your will, O My God, and Your law is within My heart"** (Psalm 40:7-8; see also Hebrews 10:5-10). The prophet Isaiah reports these words from the Messiah's mouth: **"The Lord GOD has opened My ear; and I was not rebellious, nor did I turn away. I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting"** (Isaiah 50:5-6).

In His ministry Jesus often referred to the fact that He was being obedient to the will of His Father. At Jacob's well in Samaria Jesus told His disciples: **"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work"** (John 4:34). When the Jewish leaders were persecuting Jesus for healing on the Sabbath, Jesus responded: **"I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me"** (John 5:30). When the Jewish leaders demanded that Jesus give them a sign from heaven, Jesus told them: **"I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day"** (John 6:38-40).

Notice that it was His Father's will to save sinners and give them eternal life and a resurrection to that life on the last day. This was the Christ's assignment. Jesus was willing to carry out this assignment, even though it involved being punished for the sin of the world. Even though Jesus knew very well what drinking the cup meant, He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane: **"Not as I will, but as You will"** (Matthew 26:39). A few minutes later He said: **"Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?"** (John 18:11).

Anticipating the fulfillment of His assignment on the next day, Jesus said to His Father on the night before His death: **"I have finished the work which You have given Me to do"** (John 17:4), and the next day He was able to cry out triumphantly from the cross: **"It is finished!"** (John 19:30). **"He was obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross"** (Philippians 2:8).

It is customary to speak of Jesus' active obedience and His passive obedience. By His active obedience we mean Jesus' lifelong, perfect obedience to God's Law. Jesus actively obeyed God's law. Jesus, as God, was above the law – in fact He was the Giver of the law – but He put Himself under the Law in order to redeem us from sin. His active obedience was obedience in our place. We were disobedient, but He was obedient, so that His obedience could be credited to us.

The Father Himself gave testimony to His Son's obedience by twice saying of Him: **"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"** (Matthew 3:17; Matthew 17:5) – both at His baptism and on the mountain of transfiguration. Jesus challenged His enemies to find some fault in Him by asking them: **"Which of you convicts Me of sin?"** (John 8:46). The apostle Peter, who spent over three years in close contact with Jesus, called Him **"a lamb without blemish and without spot"** (1 Peter 1:19) and said that He **"committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth"** (1 Peter 2:22).

His active obedience was necessary for our salvation, for the apostle Paul wrote: **"God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons"** (Galatians 4:4-5). **"The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath"** (Matthew 12:8). Nevertheless, Jesus put Himself under the law in order to redeem us. His perfect obedience to God's law was absolutely necessary for our redemption; however, He was not bound to obey the many man-made laws the Jewish elders had added to God's commandments because they were not commanded by God.

Adam's disobedience brought sin and condemnation into the world, but Jesus' obedience resulted in God declaring all sinners righteous in Jesus, being fully justified – declared righteous – in His sight. For this is what Paul says: **"As through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous"** (Romans 5:18-19).

By Jesus' passive obedience we mean the suffering that Jesus went through because He was taking our place and being punished for our sins. It is called His passive obedience, because Jesus suffered because of what others did to Him.

Our sins put us all under God's curse. All mankind is under God's curse because every person has sinned, and **"cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them"** (Galatians 3:10). But on the cross Jesus took that curse on Himself: **"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree')"** (Galatians 3:13).

This explains why Jesus was in such agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, for He knew full well that on the next day He would be punished for the sin of the whole world. He would drink to the dregs the contents of the cup of punishment for all human sin. This explains what was happening on the cross when **"from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land"** (Matthew 27:45). It was especially in those three hours – from noon until 3:00 in the afternoon on that Good Friday – that God was pouring out on His Son the full wrath of God against all human sin. Surely Jesus was speaking the truth when He cried out on that dark afternoon: **"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"** (Matthew 27:46). God really did forsake Him, for that is what our sins deserved.

Isaiah prophesied: **"He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed... And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all"** (Isaiah 53:5-6). This is what was taking place on the cross. **"He (God) made Him who knew no sin (Jesus) to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"** (2 Corinthians 5:21). Notice the great exchange: our sin is transferred from us to Jesus and At the same time Jesus' perfect righteousness is transferred to us and credited to our account.

Just as Jesus' perfect life of obedience to the law was necessary for our redemption, so also His perfect death bearing our sins was necessary for our redemption. In Jesus **"we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins"** (Colossians 1:14). We are **"redeemed...with the precious blood of Christ"** (1 Peter 1:18-19). **"Having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him... We were reconciled to God through the death of His Son"** (Romans 5:9-10).

One of our Lutheran confessions, the *Formula of Concord – Solid Declaration*, speaks of Christ's obedience in this way: *"His obedience consists not only in His suffering and death but also in the fact that He freely put Himself in our place under the law and fulfilled the law with this obedience and reckoned it to us as righteousness. As a result of His total obedience – which He performed on our behalf for God in His deeds and suffering, in life and death – God forgives our sin, considers us upright and righteous, and grants us eternal salvation"* (*Book of Concord, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 564*).

Questions

1. Why did the Old Testament high priest have to bring the blood of two offerings to the Lord?
2. Why did Jesus have to offer the blood of only one sacrifice?
3. Provide some evidence that shows that Jesus' obedience was a willing obedience.
4. What is meant by the cup that Jesus prayed about in Gethsemane?
5. What is the difference between Jesus' active obedience and His passive obedience?
6. Why did Jesus have to be born under the law?
7. Who are the two men referred to in Romans 5:18-19?
8. When was Jesus cursed in our place because of our sin?
9. What great event took place during the three dark hours on Good Friday?
10. What is the great exchange that gives us hope for salvation?
11. What is all included in the total obedience of Christ?