

The Passive Obedience of Christ

Philippians 2:8, Ash Wednesday

February 6, 2008

Beloved of the Lord..... We are here on this Ash Wednesday, to give all honor and glory and praise, to our crucified Christ, who suffered extreme agony of body and soul upon the cross, for our sins, and for our salvation. Jesus said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." Indeed we are drawn to Him like no other, for there is no man, nor god, like the Lord our God, who humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. For when He was lifted up between heaven and earth, He hung and suffered there in our place, in our stead, as our substitute, that the fierceness of God's wrath turn away from us, and fall upon Himself. Christ paid our penalty so perfectly and completely that God can now give unto you, grace, mercy, and peace!

But to understand this more perfectly, we must begin with the perfect justice of God, which cannot be violated. "The immutable justice of God demands of men a perfect obedience to His law, and pronounces eternal damnation on all transgressors" (Pieper). Since God is just, He cannot simply pronounce all sins forgiven without giving proper punishment for sin. For if there is even one sin committed by devil or men, this sin must be punished. God's perfect justice demands perfect and exacting punishment. And so all men, all sinners by nature fall under God's wrath and curse. Galatians 3:10 says, "Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the Book of the Law to do them." "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." Many in this world try to excuse their sin by saying, "Well all men are sinners, and God knows we can't but help to sin, so surely God will not cast us into hell since we can't help it." But they are wrong, deadly wrong. To the Jews who thought they had no need for forgiveness Jesus said, "I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come."

If man then is to be saved, this salvation must come from without, it must come from God. And thanks be to God, that is exactly what God did. Our text says "He humbled Himself", that is God humbled Himself, becoming a man, that He might take the place of men. Truly, Jesus Christ saved us in two necessary ways. FIRST, He lived a perfect and sinless life in our stead and in our place. Jesus was made "under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law." This is called His active obedience. SECOND, with His

own blood He would pay the penalty for man's sin. He would take and receive the eternal punishment of man's sins upon Himself, as if they were His own. The Bible says, "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." The Passive Obedience of Christ then, is that the Just and Holy Christ, suffered upon His own self the penalty and payment for our sin, the Just suffered for the sake of the unjust. In this way He would bring us to God.

Jesus did this in a passive way. He suffered quietly, and willingly, for our sin. The Lamb went uncomplaining forth. Isaiah foretold this passive and enduring nature of Christ. "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." He did not complain, but instead quietly suffered in humble obedience to His Father. "When he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." He suffered and endured all, because it was His Father's will. It was also Jesus' will, and so He willingly "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

Sometimes when we think of Christ, knowing Him to be righteous and holy, we forget that by taking our sins upon Himself, He once stood before God as the most unholy of men. Since the Lord had laid on Him the iniquity of us all, Jesus knew in His conscience, and felt our sins, as if they were His own. He also felt the guilt of our sins, the weight of the world's sins were upon His shoulders. Luther said, Christ is no longer "an innocent and sinless Person, but a sinner who has and bears the sin of Paul, the blasphemer and persecutor, and of Peter, the denier of his Master, and of David, the adulterer and murderer; in a word, He bears and has all the sins of all men in His body.....He himself is innocent, but since He bears the sins of the world, His innocence is weighed down by the sins and guilt of the whole world. Whatever sins I and you have done have become the sins of Christ, as though He Himself had committed them" (Pieper III, 347). Therefore when Christ hung upon the cross before His heavenly Father, Christ appeared to be God's enemy.

That is why God's wrath poured out upon Him. Even in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus begins to feel God's wrath strongly so that He sweat as it were "great drops of blood." He then goes through trial after trial, repeatedly being condemned as guilty. Then being lifted up between heaven and earth, He receives all the punishment of God against our sin. Being totally alone

and forsaken Jesus cries out, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Here our Christ endured our hell. Yet even in hell Jesus says, "My God, my God". So though the Father had forsaken Him, Jesus continually puts His trust in the Father. "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." Finally, being obedient unto the Father till the end, Jesus prays, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." He bows His head, and gives up the ghost. He lays down His life that we might live.

In this passive obedience of Christ, we learn humble and quiet submission to God's will. What God ordains is always best, therefore we humbly and quietly submit to the will of our Father. The Bible says, "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." I Pet. 2 And so when we think of Christ who humbly and quietly endured the cross, committing Himself to the judgment of the Father, we too will gladly and humbly submit to the will of our heavenly Father, whatever His will may be: for we are children in the hands of our heavenly Father. As Christ suffered for our sake, and committed Himself into the hands of His Father, so will we gladly submit and entrust our souls to our heavenly Father. His will is always best.

But what then is the fruit of all this? What was the fruit of Christ's humble and passive obedience? It was the perfect and complete reconciliation between God and man! The cross leads to glory! For Christ, by way of the cross, appeased and satisfied God's anger so perfectly, that the gates of heaven are thrown open before us! Indeed through Christ Jesus and His vicarious satisfaction, in our stead, and in our place, God pronounces and declares all men justified and redeemed from all sin! Dear troubled soul, by and through Christ, God no longer counts your sins against you, but rightly declares you innocent, righteous, and holy in His sight! Through Christ there is such perfect and complete reconciliation that God can now say, "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil." Jer. 29 Of your own sins God is now able to say, "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." By and through Christ, it is as if you never committed any sin at all! "What sin?" God says, "I don't remember anything!" And so the prophet Micah writes, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity,.....he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion

upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." Beloved of the Lord, take comfort on this first evening of Lent and throughout Lent until the glorious day of Easter! For by way of Christ, truly God has cast all our sins behind His back into the depths of the sea. The cross leads to glory! Amen.

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