

Learning Obedience

Sometimes we're just stupid.... or at least do stupid things- maybe it's just me. (I realize that "stupid" is a word many try to *weed out* of their children's vocabulary, but in this case, it is exactly the right word- sorry!) I get the feeling that God looks down from heaven at me and sighs (hopefully *sympathetically*), "What were you thinking?" The truth is that I probably wasn't, thinking that is. The reality is that most of the biblical instructive content is focused not so much on what we should *believe*, or even *feel*, but what we should *do*, cf. Matt.19:16-22. But think about it, if we *believe* the right things about God, ourselves, others, and heaven, and *feel* the right things about God, ourselves, others, and heaven, we **will** do the right things! Thus, *doing* the "right" things is inseparably connected to *thinking* and *feeling* the "right" things. Commitment is surely an important factor, but *obedience* is, therefore, a *learned* process, Hebrews 5:8!

So, how is obedience *learned*? One of the ways is through *suffering*, Heb.5:7-10.

We (again perhaps better, *I*) sometimes suffer because we make poor choices. Either through ignorance (cf. Mark 12:24), weakness (cf. Mark 14:38), or rebellion (cf. Jude 11), we make bad decisions and through these poor choices, we then suffer the *natural* consequences of sin, Gal.6:7-8. This process can be educational- *living* and *learning* from the *school of hard knocks* (though it has high tuition and low graduation rates), can be instructive. But *learning* and *living* leaves few scars! For example...

- If we refuse to *learn* and *live* according to God's order as children in the home, once we leave it we will suffer consequences in society, cf. Eph.6:1-3.
- If we refuse to *learn* and *live* according to God's order in marriage, we will suffer the consequences of misery and destruction in it, cf. 1Pet.3:1-12.
- If we refuse to *learn* and *live* according to God's order regarding submission to government, we may become guests at one of its schools (with bars, guards, and razor-wire fences), cf. Rom.13:1-7!

Of course, I am in no way suggesting that Jesus *learned obedience* through this type of *suffering* since He obviously never made bad decisions or poor choices, and therefore never suffered as a result of such, cp. Heb.4:15! So, how did He *learn obedience through suffering*?

The passage still says He "*learned obedience through the things which He suffered*." While the causal impetus for His *learning* of *obedience* was indeed *suffering*, the source was not His own poor choices and bad decisions, but those of others. This is a VERY different level of *higher education*! How so?

- It's one thing to make bad choices and suffer as a result of them. That's easy. Even animals can *learn obedience* (called *training*) this way. But,
- It is another matter entirely to *learn obedience* when no personal bad choices have been made and yet suffering still occurs. This is exactly what happened to Jesus! Note the context.

- V.7. Though He offered up *prayers* and *supplications* with *loud crying* (in great earnestness, cf. Luke 22:44) requesting that the Father “*remove this cup* (of *suffering*, PCS) *from Me*” (Luke 22:42a), and adding the fact that He “*was heard because of His piety*” (Heb.5:7), the petition was denied- and He subsequently *suffered* mightily. Now think about it: Have you ever *prayed earnestly* that some potential *suffering*- that was through no fault of your own, might be removed or averted? If this prayer was NOT granted, did you learn *obedience* from it, or become *embittered*, or *doubtful of* or even *disbelieving in God*? Or, were you *perfected* (Greek word is *telioo*- to carry through completely, to accomplish, finish, bring to an end¹) by it? Cf. 1Pet.2:18-24.
- V.9. Having been thus *perfected*, He became the “*source*” (KJV and NKJV translate as “*author*”) of *eternal salvation*. There are two additional considerations here: 1) the Greek term *aitios* or *aition*, (translated as *source* in NASB) has to do with *cause*- either positively as here, or negatively as in Acts 19:40. Now here is the point, *because* He *learned obedience* by unjust *suffering*, Jesus was *completed* or made *whole*, and could then become the *source* of salvation for everyone else. And, 2) the salvation thus provided was *eternal*. Suffering as a result of our own poor choices and sinful action is the way of the world, cf. Gal.6:7-8. While it can be profitable as a *learning tool*, it is definitely *lower education*. But suffering unjustly, suffering by the poor choices and sinful behavior of others instead of yourself, this is *higher education*- and has *eternal* benefits, cf. 1Pet.3:13-18!

Conclusions:

We have a great *High Priest* who *sympathizes* with our *weaknesses*- not because He’s *been there* and *done that* with regard to *sin*, but because He’s *been there* and *overcome that* with regard to *temptation*, Heb.4:14-15.

Therefore, though *sinful* ourselves, we can “*draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we might receive mercy and grace to help in time of need*,” Heb.4:16. I don’t believe that such refers only to forgiveness of sins, but also includes strength to *overcome* that we, too, my *learn obedience* leading to *perfection* (wholeness/maturity) when suffering *unjustly*.

What about it? Are you stuck in *lower education* through suffering consequences as a result of your own poor choices and sinful behavior? Or, have you graduated to *higher education* through *learning obedience* when suffering *unjustly*? If so, then you have the opportunity to be like Jesus and become *perfected*!

¹ Strong, J. (1995). *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon*.