

- c. Jesus lived out “the days of His flesh” as a fully human being who learned obedience – i.e., what it is to be an authentic image-son (cf. 1:1-2) – through the things He suffered. That suffering had two dimensions: The first was the suffering that comes to all people by virtue of living in a cursed creation and an alienated and broken human world. The second was unique to Jesus, but is now shared by all those who participate in His life and likeness. This is the suffering that results from *contradiction*: living as true image-children in the context of Adamic humanness (cf. Isaiah 50:1-6, 53:1-3; Matthew 10:16-22, 24:1-9; John 15:18-25, 17:13-14; Galatians 5:16-25; 2 Timothy 3:12; Revelation 2:8-11 with 12:1-17).

Suffering was the instrument of Jesus’ learning and growth, but in a specific and critically-important sense. The *natural* relationship between suffering, obedience and growth for human beings involves learning lessons from disobedience and failure: *The reason that suffering tends to nurture obedience is that people learn by experience that it’s generally preferable to do the right thing than suffer the consequences of doing the wrong thing.* This is a basic lesson that children learn at an early age (at least where parents wisely require their children to face the consequences of their behavior and choices), and it just keeps getting reinforced throughout the process of life. The demands of obedience grow over time, and so do the consequences of disobedience; whereas disregarding a parent’s warning about a hot stove results in a burned finger, disregarding the greater demands of human righteousness will eventually “burn” an entire life.

This universal human understanding of the relationship between obedience and suffering explains why Christians struggle with verse 8. Humans learn – and learn *best* – from the suffering they incur through sin and failure, but this cannot be the case with Jesus, unless sin and failure are ascribed to Him. This isn’t an issue for those who regard Him as just another man (albeit an exemplary one). But it is a massive problem if the New Testament presentation of Him is correct. Indeed, the Hebrews writer himself was adamant that Jesus was without sin – “holy, innocent, undefiled, and separated from sinners” (4:15, 7:26). And yet, he equally insisted that He, like all human beings, learned obedience through suffering.

Again, the writer’s approach is to make his case about Jesus, His work, and His accomplishment by highlighting various areas of correspondence and contrast/distinction pertaining to those things (grounded in the principle of promise and fulfillment in God’s accomplishment of His purposes in and for the world). He did that with the prophets, angels, Moses, and now Aaron and his priesthood. *But at the center of all of those comparisons (and those yet to come) is the fundamental correspondence and distinction between the human race and Jesus’ human existence.* That human dynamic is critically important if we are to understand Jesus’ person and work and who and what we are as Christians.

With respect to the issue at hand, the *man* Jesus learned obedience through the suffering he encountered throughout His life, just as every human being does. And yet that process differed in a significant way in His case.

- The suffering experienced by all human beings arises from two causes. The first, again, is inherent in life in the present cursed creation. Irrespective of personal sin, the *intrinsic* brokenness of the creation and human creature (frailty, infirmity, disease, mortality) causes every person to suffer. But this unavoidable suffering is enlarged and intensified by the inclinations, decisions, choices and behaviors within human control.
- Jesus was subject to both of these dimensions of human suffering, but with a critical distinction. He, too, suffered all of what comes from living in the fallen world as a weak and mortal son of Adam. And He also suffered the consequences of personal volition, *but from the antithetical vantage point*. Whereas every other human suffers because of being driven by the fallen Adamic nature, Jesus suffered because He directed Himself *against* that nature. All others suffer because of their subjection to their fallen humanness; Jesus suffered because He contradicted, opposed and condemned that way of being human – and not from a distance, *but in Himself* as fully sharing in that same Adamic humanness. He contradicted, condemned and destroyed Adamic man, not as God, but as man in Adam.

Thus Jesus experienced the suffering that arises from contradiction, rather than conformity. And this points to another critical consideration in understanding the concept of Him learning obedience through suffering. And that is the way Jesus' obedience differs from the natural human conception of obedience, which has its goal in maximizing personal benefit (as personally determined).

- Because human obedience arises from the perceived unacceptability of outcomes associated with disobedience, obedience itself is a matter of restraint exercised in view of preferable outcomes. *For human life as we know it, obedience is the result of a cost-benefit analysis, and so involves the modification of our natural human existence, not its transformation.*
- But Jesus' life set obedience in an entirely different light; He showed that obedience isn't about the reparation of human existence as we know it, but the renewing of man according to an entirely new way of being human. *Jesus' obedience wasn't about polishing up Adamic man, or even restoring the human creature to its pre-fallen Adamic state. Rather, His obedience was that of a new Adam – the eschatological (“last”) Adam who is man of the Spirit; man the image-son as God intended him to be.*

All of this highlights the crucial truth that we must understand Jesus' obedience, as well as His suffering, through the lens of a fundamentally different perspective than the one we naturally bring to bear.

- We must see His experience of suffering and learning as *fully human*, just as ours is: He, too, was beset by weakness, infirmity, and the challenges of mortality, and He was tempted in every way as we are.

- At the same time, His suffering differed from and transcended ours to the extent that it arose from contradiction rather than conformity.
 - And this different suffering underscores the difference in the *obedience* that He learned from it: The obedience that arises from conformity to one's Adamic humanness is *itself* Adamic; it is simply the natural response of a natural mind to personal circumstances and personal interests. On the other hand, the obedience associated with the contradiction of Adamic humanness is entirely different; it is the authentic *sonship* that defines man in truth. It is the obedience that marks the Last Adam and the image-children who share in His life and likeness (2:9-15).
- d. This, then, provides helpful insight into what it means that Jesus was "*made perfect.*" If perfection is understood in terms of *sinlessness*, then it's nonsensical to speak of Jesus as becoming perfect; He was always perfect in this sense. But the writer was referring to the perfection of *completion* – the perfection of arriving at a predetermined and purposed goal. Jesus became perfect in the sense that He fully realized the ordained goal of the process of learning obedience through suffering (5:9). He was made perfect by faithfully walking out and fully attaining the life of authentic sonship in the context of being a son of Adam.

But again, Jesus' perfection as a son had a larger goal than His own sonship. God's purpose for Him was that He should be a new Adam – the "*source of eternal salvation (deliverance) for those who obey Him.*" And He is the source (or basis) of salvation, not as an exemplar, or even strictly because of His atoning death (though this was critical), but because He is the substance and fountainhead of the true humanity God intended for His human creature. Two things underscore this truth: The first is that this salvation is *eternal*, which signifies its nature (9:14), as well as its certainty and continuance (6:2, 9:12, 15, 13:20). It is a salvation that involves sharing in the life of God Himself – the life that is in the resurrected Messiah and is conveyed to human beings by His Spirit (cf. John 3:26, 5:24, 17:3; Romans 8:6; Colossians 3:1-4). But secondly, this salvation belongs to those who *obey* Jesus, who Himself learned obedience through suffering. The implication, then, is that this obedience is of the same sort as His: It is the obedience of authentic sonship, which has its substance in the obedient Image-Son, and so is worked out and perfected through suffering, as it was with Him.

- e. The writer constructed his presentation of Jesus around the principles of correspondence and distinction, and this dynamic applies just as much to His priesthood and its ministration. He is a human priest who performs His ministration with the full experiential knowledge of human weakness, temptation, and dependence, but He does so in triumph as having overcome human sin and condemnation. His priesthood corresponds to Aaron's, but it also *transcends* it as fulfilling what the Aaronic priesthood only portrayed and predicted. He isn't merely a better or more effective priest; He is a high priest of an entirely different order – the order of Melchizedek, the archetypal priest-king (5:10).