

Heaven's Perspective on the Cross: Submission

Code: B130923

The death of Christ was a [sacrifice](#), but that does not mean Jesus was an unwilling subject of God's wrath. We know this because the death of Christ was not only a sacrifice to God, it was submission to God.

Christ's whole life was perfect—He did everything the Father wanted Him to do. He testified to that fact again and again, particularly in the Gospel of John. In John 4:24, He said to His disciples, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work” (cf. John 6:38; 10:18). Always, at all levels, even with the limited understanding of a child, He obeyed God fully (Luke 2:49). His delight was to do the will of God. His was a life of complete and perfect obedience.

Theologians through the years have called this Christ's “active obedience.” In other words, Christ's work on our behalf did not begin at the cross. All His life, He was fulfilling all righteousness in every way. At the very start of His public ministry, He insisted on being baptized because, as He told John the Baptist, “It is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15). He didn't need baptism. John's baptism was a symbol of repentance. But He did it to provide a perfect righteousness on behalf of those for whom He would die (Romans 5:18–19). It's a righteousness that encompasses even the symbol of our repentance.

Of course, obeying God is something vastly different from receiving the wrath of God. In all of His life of obedience, never did obedience stir the kind of agony in His perfect soul that we see as He approached the judgment of the cross. Theologians refer to this as Christ's “passive obedience.” But we must not misunderstand that word “passive.” We say Christ was passively obedient because He received the just wrath of God on the cross, but this does not mean that He was not actively obeying the Father in the process.

On the cross, He continued in the obedience which began with the Incarnation. He would be given to drink the full cup of His Father's wrath. Never had He received a hint of disapproval (much less a curse) from the Father. But in order to bear all the sins of His people, He would have to suffer that inconceivable, infinitely abhorrent chastisement for a world of sin. The level of submission Jesus offered to His Father on the cross is inconceivable.

He remained impeccably obedient to God—subject to God's law and in perfect obedience to it throughout His entire life and death. And that very righteousness is credited as justification to those who believe (2 Corinthians 5:21). It is the only *human* righteousness in the history of time and eternity that meets the standard of perfection that God's law requires. That is why it was essential for the incarnate Son of God (and Him alone) to be the One who puts us into a right relationship with His Father. Only when His perfect life is credited to our account are we fit to stand before God.

So in His living as well as in His dying, there was saving power for us. His perfect life is credited to our account as righteousness, just as His obedience in death is credited to our account as a payment for our sin. God had to be *satisfied* with both Christ's submission and His sacrifice before His wrath

and righteousness could be propitiated.

Everything Christ did was in perfect compliance to the will of God, and His perfect, flawless righteousness in all its fullness is imputed to all who believe.

But Christ's obedience, passive and active, would be of no value to us if He did not stand in our place as a substitute. So, that is what we will focus on next time.

(Adapted from [*The Gospel According to Paul*](#))

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