

- **Heb. 5:8**—“***Though he were Son***, he learned **obedience** from the things which he suffered.”

That is:

Though he were Son [i.e., ‘notwithstanding the fact that he was the Son,’ and thus not in a place of obedience or subjection, but co-equal in every way in the eternal relations of the Triune Godhead], **he learned obedience** [not, ‘learned to obey,’ but ‘learned obedience’ by experience] from the things which he suffered [on earth as the God-Man].

“But the plain fact which quickly appears and characterises his [Adam’s] ruin is his disobedience. He *disobeyed unto death*; the grand contrast of which is the Second man, the Last Adam, who became *obedient unto death*. **Yet in His eternal being, in His proper position, in His inalienable personal dignity, the Son was a divine person, and, as such, had nothing to do with obedience. For this very reason it is said in Heb. 5:8, that He learned obedience from (or, by) the things which He suffered. He did not know what it was to obey till He came down to be man. He knew perfectly well what it was for others, for every creature; but He was no creature but Creator. Nevertheless, having become man, He loyally undertook the duties of man; and the very first duty of man is to obey God.**” (William Kelly [WK])

“Being in the form of God, He emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondman. **Of His own will**, He divested Himself of His prerogatives as God, ***choosing not to command as God but to obey as a servant***. **All the inherent rights of deity are His inalienably** [as the Divine Son]; ***obedience, however, is a function not of deity, but of one who takes the place of submission to the will of another***. Being God, and being come in man’s likeness, Christ Jesus undertook the place of servitude. **‘Though He were Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered’ (Heb. 5:8)**. Yet He, ‘according to flesh, is the Christ, Who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.’ (Rom. 9:5).” (W.J. Hocking [WJH])

“Now, the transcendent glory of the obedience of Christ which He carried as far as death, even the death of the cross, lies in the fact that **being the Eternal Son He deigned to enter into that relationship of submission for the glory of God. Being Son in the Godhead and exempt from all obligations and conditions of servitude, He became the Servant of God, of Jehovah**. To this end, He ‘emptied Himself, taking a bondman’s form, taking His place in [the] likeness of men’ (Phil. 2: 7). But while the Holy Spirit in Philippians describes graphically how **One ‘in the form of God,’ a Divine Person, took the ‘form of a servant,’** or bondsman, ***we nowhere in scripture read that He took ‘the form of a Son,’*** though scripture witnesses that in His incarnation He was still the Son, but not Child. To the place of subjection, the Blessed One ‘descended,’ for He chose to become the Righteous Servant of Jehovah, but **all scripture is silent as to His becoming the Son. *Being the Son, He both willed and submitted to be sent***, and being sent, He did the will of Him that sent Him. **‘Though He were Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered’ (Heb. 5:8)**. His obedience was more than the obedience of a Servant; it was the obedience of the Son—an obedience, moreover, which He learned in the school of suffering.”

“The teaching of scripture concerning our Lord is that He, the Son, at His incarnation came into the place of subjection or obedience. It was in that place of relationship that He ‘learned’ to submit to the will of Him Who had sent Him. ‘Though He were Son, yet learned He obedience from the things which He suffered’ (Heb. 5:8). The personal dignities and glories of Him Who is the Son and Who assumed the conditions of subjection and suffering are previously unfolded in the same Epistle (**Heb. 1**). **He Who is there shown to be God and Jehovah as well as Son learned obedience from the things which He suffered. Does not the essential glory of His Person magnify His obedience beyond all comparison and elevate His submission to an unexampled excellence? Subjection was foreign to the nature of the Eternal Son, yet He learned obedience when incarnate. The absurdity of the assertion that subjection is denoted by the word, Son, is seen at once when applied to this passage [Heb. 5:8], substituting those words [‘in subjection’] for the word ‘Son.’ The statement of the Messianic glory is converted into a mere platitude by this change: ‘Though He were in subjection, yet learned He obedience from the things which He suffered.’** How commonplace! The one who is subject *must* obey. **The emphatic force of ‘though,’ which means ‘notwithstanding the fact that,’ is lost.** The glory of the obedient Son is departed from the passage!

“This gratuitous suggestion is a real dishonour done to the Lord in the circumstances of His humiliation. If [His] sonship ‘denotes subjection,’ as they say, then obedience is the normal duty of the Son, and if He does the things commanded Him, He is not worthy even to be thanked (Luke 17:9). If His obedience cost Him suffering, does not every good soldier endure hardness (2 Tim. 2:3)? **By this**

faulty interpretation of *Sonship as applied to our Lord*, the true significance of Heb. 5:8 is perverted, and the glory of the obedience of the Son is reduced to the level of the faithfulness of a servant. *The subjection described in this text was exceptional and unequalled because it was found in One Who obeyed, 'though He were Son.'* His personal status exempted Him from all obligation to be subject, yet He obeyed. Of His own voluntary will, He undertook the position and responsibilities of a bond-servant. The Son becoming subject was a glorified excellence unparalleled in the history of creation, and this excellence the Holy Spirit delineates and magnifies, especially in the Gospel of Mark and in the Epistle to the Hebrews.”

“It was Christ’s eternal Sonship that imparted the incomparable character to His service on earth. In the Godhead there is uniformity of will, and therefore no subjection of One to Another. In Deity, the Son knew no subjection, but on earth, ‘though He were Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.’ In the lowly place of subjection which He assumed, the Son chose to receive commandments from the Father and to be obedient to them with infinite dispatch and infinite delight. What obedience could match this in kind or in degree?” (WJH)

Now compare the following for the significance of *His name and eternal relationship to the Father*—that is, *the Son of God, eternal Son of the eternal Father, co-equal in every way in the eternal relations of the Triune Godhead*:

“And as they went to bring his disciples word, behold also, Jesus met them, saying, Hail! And they coming up ***took him by the feet and worshiped him.*** Then Jesus says to them, ***Fear not; go, bring word to my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there they shall see me. . . .*** But the eleven disciples went into Galilee to the mountain which Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, ***they worshipped him:*** but some doubted. ***And Jesus coming up spoke to them, saying, All power has been given me in heaven and upon earth.*** Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them to ***the name [not ‘Names,’ but the singular Name of the fully revealed God, the Triune Name] of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*** And behold, ***I am with you*** all the days, until the completion of the age” (Matt. 28:9-10, 16-20)

“But Jesus answered them, ***My Father worketh hitherto and I [the Son] work.*** For this therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he had not only violated the Sabbath, but also said that ***God was his own Father [in such a manner as to be] making himself equal with God.***” (John 5:17-18)

“***That all may honour the Son, even as they honour the Father.*** He who honours not the Son, honours not the Father who has sent him.” (John 5:23)

“***I [the Son] and the Father are one.*** The Jews ***therefore*** again took stones that they might stone him. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewn you of my Father; for which work of them do ye stone me? The Jews answered him, For a good work we stone thee not, but for ***blasphemy***, and because thou, being a man, ***makest thyself God.*** Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, ‘Ye are gods’? If he called *them* ‘gods’ to whom the word of God came (and the scripture cannot be broken), do ye say of him ***whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest, because I said, I am Son of God?*** (John 10:30-36)

“The Jews answered him, We have a law, and ***according to our law he ought to die, because he made himself Son of God.***” (John 19:7)

“***He that beholds me [the Son], beholds him [the Father] that sent me.***” (John 12:45)

“Jesus says to him, Am I so long a time with you, and thou hast not known me, Philip? ***He that has seen me [the Son] has seen the Father;*** and how sayest thou, Shew us the Father?” (John 14:9)

“***I [the Son] came out from [Gr. para, from with] the Father and have come into the world [‘being the Son, He both willed and submitted to be sent, and being sent, He did the will of Him that sent Him’];*** again I leave the world and go to the Father.” (John 16:28)

“And now glorify me, thou **Father**, along with thyself, with *the glory which I [the Son] had along with thee before the world was [i.e., in eternity past, before the beginning of time/creation].*” (John 17:5)

“**Father**, as to those whom thou hast given me *[the Son]*, I desire that where I am they also may be with me, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me, for thou *[the Father]* lovedst me *[the Son]* before the foundation of the world *[i.e., in eternity past, before the beginning of time/creation, in the eternal communion and intimacy of the Godhead the Father’s love ever dwelt in complacent affection upon ‘the Son of His love.’]*.” (John 17:24)

“**Grace** shall be with you, **mercy, peace from** God the Father, **and from** the Lord Jesus Christ, **the Son of the Father**, in truth and love.” (2 John 3)

“**That which was from the beginning**, that which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes; that which we contemplated, and our hands handled, concerning **the Word of life**; (and the life has been manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and report to you **the eternal life [the eternal Son], which was with the Father, and has been manifested to us**). . . . And we know that **the Son of God** has come, and has given us an understanding that we should know him that is true; and **we are in him that is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life**. Children, **keep yourselves from idols.**” (1 John 1:1-2, 5:20-21)

“**God [God as such, the (now fully revealed) Triune God]** having spoken in many parts and in many ways formerly to the fathers in the prophets, at the end of these days has spoken to us **in the person of the Son [the Son become flesh, the Son in manhood]**, whom he *[the personal God as such]* has established heir of all things, **by whom [by the Creator-Son] also he made the worlds [Gr. aiones, lit. “ages,” meaning the Son made ‘the whole created universe of time and space’; and since the Son created the ages of time, the Son is therefore timeless, the eternal Son]; who being [inherently being in His Divine Person in manhood; the God-Man being] the effulgence of his glory [the radiance of God’s intrinsic splendor and perfections, the outshining of Divine excellence in display] and the expression of his substance [the exact expression and representation of the essential nature or being of God], and upholding all things by the word of his power [i.e., upholding ‘ALL things’ by the Son’s own word of power, and thus His own Omnipotent, Almighty utterance of power!]**, having made by himself the purification of sins, set himself down on the right hand of the greatness on high.” (Heb. 1:1-3)

“But as to **the Son [the Father says in Ps. 45:6], Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever**, and a sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. . . . And **[as to the Son, the Father says in Ps. 102:25-27], Thou in the beginning, Lord [Jehovah, the Self-Existent, Uncreated, Ever Existing, Eternal One, who caused the ‘beginning’ of all things to begin], hast founded the earth, and works of thy hands are the heavens**. They shall perish, but thou continuest still; and they all shall grow old as a garment, and as a covering shalt thou roll them up, and they shall be changed; but **thou art the Same [another Divine title of the only true God, Jehovah, meaning ‘the self-existent one who does not change,’ in contrast to all creatures who are such as are indeed changeable]**, and thy years shall not fail.” (Heb. 1:8, 10-12)

“**Though he were Son [i.e., ‘notwithstanding the fact that he was the Son,’ and thus not in a place of obedience or subjection, but co-equal in every way in the eternal relations of the Triune Godhead]**, he learned obedience from the things which he suffered *[on earth as the God-Man]*.” (Heb. 5:8)

“For this Melchisedec, King of Salem, priest of the most high God *[recorded in Genesis 14]*, who met Abraham returning from smiting the kings, and blessed him; whom Abraham gave also the tenth portion of all; first *[‘Melchisedec’]* being interpreted is King of righteousness, and then also King of Salem, which is King of peace; *[who is further ‘interpreted’ as being] without father, without mother, without genealogy; having neither beginning of days nor end of life*, but *[that is, the Holy Spirit designed the inspired historical record of Gen.14 to omit any such references, so that Melchisedec’s person and priesthood would serve as a type and thus be] assimilated to the Son of God*, abides a priest continually *[our Lord, in regard to His Manhood, did have ‘mother,’ ‘genealogy,’ ‘beginning of days’ and ‘end of life,’ but absolutely not so in regard to His deity as the eternal Son of God, who as such has neither beginning nor end, being Himself the Eternal Life in His Person, who in this sense was thus ‘without father’ too, i.e.,*

in the sense of being without any derivation or source of origin/life/existence, but is Eternal, Timeless and Self-Existent].” (Heb. 7:1-3)

“Herein as to us has been manifested the love of God, that **God has sent his only-begotten [monogenes, meaning only, unique, one-of-a-kind and most-deeply-loved] Son into the world**, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son a propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:9-10)

“No one has seen God at any time; the only-begotten [monogenes, meaning only, unique, one-of-a-kind and most-deeply-loved] Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” (John 1:18)

The eternal Sonship of Christ is not dependent on the notion of the “eternal generation” of the Son, which latter I reject. But the truth of His eternal Sonship itself is absolutely vital!

“While I hold to eternal relationships in the Godhead, I reject the metaphysical speculations about 'the eternal generation of the Son,' 'begotten before all worlds,' eternal procession' of either the Son or the Spirit, or *any thought of subordination within the Godhead*. The notion that when one rejects 'eternal generation of the Son,' therefore he must also reject the eternal Sonship, is absurd. The eternal Sonship is not dependent on metaphysical speculations based on misunderstanding of certain scriptures and confusion about 'only begotten Son.' ” (R.A. Huebner)

Note on “only-begotten” (Gr. *monogenes*): *Monogenes* occurs a total of nine times in the NT, five of which are used in reference to Christ (and only in the writings of John: John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). It means *only, unique, one-of-a-kind and most-deeply-loved*, and as such speaks of God the Son's *underived, unacquired, unique, eternal relationship* with the Father. ***Monogenes carries no inherent notions of being “generated” or “begotten” (which are entirely different words in the original Hebrew and Greek, and never used of Christ as to His eternal Sonship in the Godhead, but only in relation to the manhood taken into His Person as, e.g., in Psalm 2:7 and Luke 1:35).*** This is evident from the fact that our Saviour is and always remains the *Monogenes* Son even with the *myriad* of believers who have indeed been “*begotten*” as children of God through the new birth and given the place of sonship as “*sons of God*.” Moreover, compare the use and meaning of *monogenes* in **Heb. 11:17—along with the Hebrew equivalent in Gen. 22:2** (on which Heb. 11:17 is based)—in regard to Isaac in relationship to Abraham: “By faith Abraham, when tried, offered up Isaac, and he who had received to himself the promises offered up his ***only-begotten {monogenes}***” (Heb. 11:17). “And he [God] said [to Abraham], ***Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, Isaac,*** and get thee into the land of Moriah, and there offer him up for a burnt-offering on one of the mountains which I will tell thee of” (Gen. 22:2). But Abraham clearly had *more than one* son; in fact, Ishmael was his *first* son, born 13 years earlier! Isaac was thus Abraham's “only-begotten” in the sense of being the *unique, one-of-a-kind and most-deeply-loved son in relationship* with his father Abraham!

Christ is “the Son in the highest possible character, the only-begotten Son, distinguishing Him thus from any other who might, in a subordinate sense, be son of God. ‘The only-begotten Son, *which is* in the bosom of the Father.’ Observe: not which *was* [nor ‘*which came to be*’], but ‘*which is*’ [‘*the one being*’]. He is viewed as retaining the same perfect intimacy with the Father, entirely unimpaired by local or any other circumstances He had entered. Nothing in the slightest degree detracted from His own personal glory, and from the infinitely near relationship which He had had with the Father from all eternity.... Under all changes, outwardly, he abode as from eternity the only-begotten Son in the bosom of the Father.” (WK)