

Of the Passive Obedience of Christ, or of His Sufferings and Death.

by John Gill

Christ suffered and died to make satisfaction for the sins of others and to bring about salvation.

Scripture: Isaiah 53:5, Matthew 26:39, John 10:18, Acts 2:23, Romans 5:8, Galatians 3:13, Ephesians 1:7, Colossians 1:20, Hebrews 12:2, 1 Peter 2:24

Topics: "Redemption through Suffering", "Passive Obedience of Christ"

Description

John Gill preaches on the passive obedience of Christ, emphasizing His willing submission to suffering and death for the sake of humanity. He highlights that Christ's entire life was marked by suffering, culminating in His crucifixion, which was foretold by the prophets. Gill explains that Christ's death was not only a physical event but also a profound spiritual sacrifice, bearing the weight of sin and divine wrath. The sermon underscores the necessity and efficacy of Christ's sufferings, which were essential for the redemption and reconciliation of His people. Ultimately, Gill illustrates that through His passive obedience, Christ fulfilled God's plan for salvation, demonstrating His love and commitment to humanity.

Transcript

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity

Book 5--Chapter 4

OF THE PASSIVE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST,

or of His Sufferings and Death

Another part of Christ's humiliation, lies in his sufferings and death; to which he readily submitted; he was "obedient unto death," and in it. He cheerfully endured all sufferings for the sake of his people, it was his Father's will and pleasure he should; he "was not rebellious, neither turned away his back from the smiters, nor his face from shame and spitting": and when the time was come to suffer death, in the room and stead of his people, according to the counsel of God, and his own agreement; he was like the innocent dumb sheep, "So he opened not his mouth;" said not one word against the sentence of death being executed on him; was not reluctant to become a sacrifice for the sins of men; but as he had "received a commandment" from his Father to lay down his life, as well as to take it up again; he readily and voluntarily obeyed that commandment; and this is what is sometimes called his passive obedience

(Isa. 50:5,6; 53:7; John 10:18). 1.

First, I shall observe what the sufferings of Christ were which he endured. They were foretold by the prophets, "who testified beforehand" of them; and the apostles said no other things than what "Moses and the prophets did say should come, that Christ should suffer," &c. (1 Pet. 1:11; Acts 26:22,23). This was intimated in the first revelation made of the Messiah; "Thou shall bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). The twenty second Psalm, and fifty third of Isaiah, and ninth of Daniel, are illustrious prophecies of his sufferings; and which have had their exact accomplishment in him.

Christ's whole life was a life of sufferings, from the cradle to the cross; he suffered very early from Herod, who sought to destroy him; and which obliged his parents to flee with him into Egypt; he suffered much from Satan's temptations; for his temptations were sufferings, "He suffered, being tempted;" and from the reproaches and persecutions of men; his life, throughout, was a life of meanness and poverty, which must be reckoned a branch of his sufferings: but what may more eminently and particularly be called his sufferings, are those which he endured as preparatory to his death, which led on to it, and issued in it: and death itself, and what attended it. 1a.

The things preparatory to his death, and which led on to it, and issued in it. 1a1. The conspiracy of the chief priests and elders to take away his life; this they had often meditated, and had made some fruitless attempts upon him: but a few days before his death it became a more serious affair; and they met, together in a body, in the palace of the high priest, to consult the most crafty methods to take him and kill him (Matthew 26:3,4), whereby was fulfilled what was foretold, "the rulers take counsel together;" the ecclesiastic rulers, as well as the civil ones (Ps. 2:2). 1a2.

The offer of Judas Iscariot to them, to betray him into their hands. A little before the passover, Christ and his disciples supped at Bethany, when Satan put it into the heart of Judas to betray him; which Christ, being God omniscient, knew, and gave an hint of it at supper; and said to Judas, "That thou doest, do quickly": upon which, he set out for Jerusalem that night, and went to the chief priests, where they were assembled, and covenanted with them to betray his Master into their hands for thirty pieces of silver.

This was one part of Christ's sufferings, to be betrayed by one of his own disciples; and which, in prophecy, is observed as such; and the sum of money is foretold for which he agreed with them; and which also is observed as an instance of great disesteem of him (Ps. 41:9; Zech. 11:12,13). 1a3. After Christ had eat his last passover with his disciples, and had instituted and celebrated the ordinance of the Supper; he went into a garden, where he used sometimes to go: here more manifestly his sufferings began; he saw what was coming upon him; the sins of his people he stood charged with as their surety, and the wrath of God for them; this caused him to be exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: at this his human nature shrunk; and he prayed that, if possible, the cup might pass from him; and the agony he was in was so great, and the pressure on his mind to heavy, and so much affected his body, that his sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling to the ground; this was a foretaste of what he was after more fully to endure (Matthew 26:38,39 Luke 22:44). 1a4.

Judas knowing the place Christ resorted to, and where he now was, came with a band of soldiers he had from the chief priests, and with a multitude of others, armed with swords and clubs, as if they came out against a thief, to take him, as our Lord observed to them; when with a kiss he betrayed him to them; and, after he had given them proof of his almighty power, and how easily he could have made his escape from them, voluntarily surrendered himself unto them; who laid hold on him, and bound him as a malefactor,

and had him to Caiaphas the high priest. 1a5.

In whose palace he endured much from men, rude and inhumane; some "spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands;" one particularly struck him with the palm of his hand, as with a rod, saying, "Answerest thou the high priest so?" all which Christ took patiently, whereby the prophecies concerning him were fulfilled (Isa. 50:6; Micah 5:1). 1a6. Still more he endured in the hall of Pilate the Roman governor, to whom the Jews delivered him bound.

Here he was accused of sedition, and of stirring up the people against the Roman government; as he had been before in the high priest's palace of an evil design to destroy the temple; which were all forged and false; as is said in prophetic language (Ps. 35:11 and though he appeared to be innocent, and that to the judge himself, who would willingly have let him go; yet such were the enmity and malice of the chief priests and elders, and of the multitude of the people, that they were the more vehement and incessant in their cries, to have Barabbas, a robber, released, and Jesus crucified: which verified what David, in the person of the Messiah, said (Ps. 69:4).

Upon which he was scourged by Pilate, or by his orders; to which he willingly submitted, according to Isaiah 50:6, and then was delivered to the Roman soldiers, who used him extremely ill; who platted a crown of thorns, and put it upon his head, which gave him pain, as well as disgrace, which is now crowned with glory and honour; and put a reed in his right hand, for a sceptre, whose proper sceptre is a sceptre of righteousness; and, in a mock way, bowed to him, to whom every knee shall bow in the most solemn manner; having before stripped him of his garments, and put on him a soldier's coat, as fit apparel for a king; and then having put on his clothes again, when they had sated themselves with sport, led him forth to be crucified, according to the sentence the governor had passed upon him, at the instance of the Jews; bearing his own cross they laid upon him, as was the custom with the Romans.

Plutarch[1] says, when malefactors were brought out to be punished, everyone carried his own cross: only Christ meeting with Simon, a Cyrenean, by the way, they obliged him to bear the cross after him; that is, one end of it, and so crucified him: which leads on to consider, 1b. Secondly, The death itself he died. He was obedient to "the death of the cross," the death he died on the cross; hence his blood shed on it is called, "the blood of the cross;" and the cross is put for the whole of his sufferings and death (Col. 1:20; Eph. 2:16).

This was plainly foretold and pointed out in prophecy, particularly in the twenty second Psalm, described by the dislocation and starting out of his bones; by the fever upon him, which usually attended crucifixion; and especially by the piercing of his hands and feet; and was typified by the lifting up of the brazen serpent by Moses in the wilderness; and the phrase of lifting up from the earth, is used by Christ himself, to signify what death he should die (John 3:14; 12:32,33).

This kind of death was a shameful one; hence Christ is said to endure the cross, and despise the shame; that is, the shame that attended it (Heb 12:2), which lay not so much in his being crucified naked, and so exposed, was that truly the case, as in its being the punishment of strangers, of servants, and slaves, and such like mean persons; but not of freemen and citizens of Rome; hence it was called "servile supplicium,"[2] a servile punishment: and it was also a painful and cruel one, as the thing itself speaks; to have the whole body stretched to the uttermost; the hands and feet, those sensible parts of it, pierced; and to have the weight of the body depending on them! it was so cruel, that the most humane[3] among the Romans, wished to have it disused, even to servants; and the more mild and gentle of the emperors[4]

would order persons to be strangled before they were nailed to the cross: and it was reckoned an accursed death.[5] And though Christ was not accursed of God, but was his beloved Son, while he was suffering this death; yet it was a symbol of the curse; and he was hereby treated as if he was one accursed; and it became a clear case hereby, that he bore the curse of the law in the room and stead of sinners; yea, that he was made a curse for them; "for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3:13).

There were several circumstances which attended the death of Christ, which made it the more ignominious and distressing; as the place where he suffered, Golgotha, so called from the skulls of malefactors executed there; and was as infamous as our Tyburn; and it was as scandalous to be crucified in the one place, as to be hanged in the other. Here he was crucified between two thieves; as if he had been guilty of the same, or a like transgression, as theirs; and so fulfilled the prophecy in Isaiah 53:12.

He "was numbered among the transgressors;" and, instead of giving him a cup of wine with frankincense, which they used to give in kindness to a person about to be executed, to intoxicate him, that he might not be sensible of his misery; they gave to Christ vinegar mixed with gall, or sour wine with myrrh, and such like bitter ingredients, the more to distress him; of which he, in prophecy, complains (Ps. 69:21). Then they parted his garments, and cast lots upon his vesture; by which it seems that he was crucified naked, the more to expose him to shame and contempt; and which was predicted in Psalm 22:18 and while he was suffering, he endured the trial of cruel mocking, from all sorts of people; not only from travelers that passed by, and from the multitude of common people, assembled on the occasion; but from the chief priests, scribes, and elders; and even from the thieves, with whom he was crucified: to all which respect is had in prophecy (Ps. 22:7,8,12,13,16).

And for three hours together, while he was on the cross, there was darkness over all the land, the sun, as it were, blushing and hiding its face at the heinousness of the sin now committed by the Jews; or as refusing to yield any relief and comfort to Christ, now sustaining as a surety the wrath of God, for the sins of his people; and might be an emblem of that greater darkness upon his soul, being now forsaken by his Father; (see Amos 8:9). And when this was over, he quickly gave up the ghost.

Let it be observed, that Christ was "put to death in the flesh;" as the apostle expresses it (1 Pet. 3:18), that is, in the body; that only suffered death; not his soul, that died not; but was commended into the hands of his divine Father: nor his Deity, or divine nature, which was impassible, and not capable of suffering death; and yet the body of Christ suffered death, in union with his divine person; hence the Lord of glory is said to be crucified and God is said to purchase the church with his blood (1 Cor. 2:8; Acts 20:28).

And the death of Christ, as the death of other men, lay in the disunion of, or in a dissolution of the union between soul and body; these two were parted for a while; the one was commended to God in heaven; the other was laid in the grave: but hereby he was not reduced to a state of non-existence, as say the Socinians; his soul was with God in paradise; and his body, when taken from the cross, was laid in a sepulchre, and where it saw no corruption. The death of Christ was "real," not in appearance only, as some of the ancient heretics affirmed; nor was he taken down from the cross alive; but was really dead, as appears by the testimony of the centurion that guarded the cross, to Pilate; by the soldiers not breaking his legs, with the others crucified with him, perceiving he was dead; and by one of them piercing his side, the "pericardium," from whence flowed blood and water; after which, had he not been dead before, he must have died then.

And lastly, his death was "voluntary;" for though his life was taken from the earth, seemingly in a violent manner, with respect to men, being cut off in a judicial way; yet not without his full will and consent; he laid it down of himself, and gave himself freely and voluntarily to be a sacrifice, through his death, for the sins of his people. Now, besides this corporal death which Christ endured, there was a death in his soul, though not of it, which answered to a spiritual and an eternal death; for as the transgression of the first Adam, involved him and all his posterity in, and exposed them to, not only a corporal death, but to a moral or spiritual, and an eternal one; so the second Adam, as the surety of his people, in order to make satisfaction for that transgression, and all others of theirs, must undergo death, in every sense of the threatening (Gen. 2:17).

And though a moral or spiritual death, as it lies in a loss of the image of God; in a privation of original righteousness; in impotence to that which is good, and in an inclination, bias, and servitude of the mind to that which is evil; could not fall upon the pure and holy soul of Christ; which must have made him unfit for his mediatorial work; yet there was something similar to it, so as to be without sin and pollution; as darkness of soul, disquietude, distress, want of spiritual joy and comfort, amazement, agony, his soul being sorrowful even unto death, pressed with the weight of the sins of his people on him, and a sense of divine wrath on account of them; and what he endured both in the garden and on the cross, especially when he was made sin and a curse, and his soul was made an offering for sin, was tantamount to an eternal death, or the sufferings of the wicked in hell;[6] for though they differ as to circumstance of time and place; the persons being different, the one finite, the other infinite; yet, as to the essence of them, the same: eternal death consists in these two things, punishment of loss, and punishment of sense: the former lies in an eternal separation from God, or a deprivation of his presence for ever; "Depart from me, ye cursed": the latter is an everlasting sense of the wrath of God, expressed by "everlasting fire".

Now Christ endured what was answerable to these; for a while he suffered the loss of his Father's gracious presence, when he said, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!" And he endured the punishment of sense, when God was wroth with him, his anointed; when his wrath was poured out like fire upon him; and his heart melted like wax within him, under it; and "the sorrows of hell" compassed him about (Ps. 89:38; 22:14; 18:5). Eternity it not of the essence of punishment; and only takes place when the person punished cannot bear the whole at once: and being finite, as sinful man is, cannot make satisfaction to the infinite Majesty of God, injured by sin, the demerit of which is infinite punishment: and as that cannot be bore at once by a finite creature, it is continued ad infinitum; but Christ being an infinite Person, was able to bear the whole at once; and the infinity of his Person, abundantly compensates for the eternity of the punishment.[7] 2.

Secondly, Let us next inquire into the cause, reason, and occasion of the sufferings and death of Christ; and how he came to undergo them. 2a. With respect to God, and his concern in them. To trace this, we must go back as far as the eternal decrees and purposes of God; which are the foundation, source, and spring of them; for it was by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, that Christ was delivered into the hands of the Jews, and was taken, and by wicked hands was crucified and slain; Herod and Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of the Jews, did no other things against him than what the hand and counsel of God determined before should be done; and therefore it was necessary they should be done (Acts 2:23; 4:27,28).

Hence all things were overruled by the providence of God in time, to bring about what he had decreed should be; and without it nothing could have been done: Pilate had no power over him but what was given him from above: so great an hand had God in the sufferings of his Son, that he is said to bruise and put

him to grief; to awake the sword of justice against him; to spare him not, but deliver him up for us all, into the hands of men, to justice and to death: and the moving cause of all this was, the great love he bore to his chosen ones in Christ; "God so loved the world," &c.

"In this was manifested the love of God towards us," &c. (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9,10; Rom. 5:8). 2b. With respect to Christ, and his will, as to his sufferings and death; we must have recourse to the council and covenant of grace and peace; in which the plan of salvation was formed upon the obedience, and sufferings, and death of Christ; these were proposed to him, and he readily assented to them; and said, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God! which was, to become incarnate; to obey, suffer, and die, in the room and stead of his people; and what moved him thereunto was, his free and unmerited love to them; and which is so fully and strongly expressed therein (John 15:13; 1 John 3:16; Eph. 5:2,25). 2c.

With respect to Satan; the concern he had therein, in putting it into the heart of Judas, to betray his Lord and Master; and in stirring up the chief priests and elders of the Jews to conspire to take away his life; and so strongly to move for it, and insist upon with the Roman Governor: this arose from that old enmity that was between him and the woman's seed; in which he betrayed great ignorance of the way of man's salvation, or else acted in great contradiction to himself, and to his own scheme. 2d.

With respect to men; these acted from different motives, and with different views: Judas from a spirit of covetousness, to gain a small sum of money from the Jews; they, from envy and malice to the Person of Christ, delivered him to Pilate, and moved to have him crucified; and he, against his own conscience, and the remonstrance of his wife, passed sentence of death on him, and delivered him to be crucified, to get and continue an interest in the affections of the Jews, and retain the good will and favour of his prince, the Roman emperor. 2e.

But the true causes and reasons why it was the pleasure of God, and the will of Christ, from their great love to men, that he should suffer for them, were their sins and transgressions; to make satisfaction for them, and save them from them; it was not for any sin of his own, for he never committed any, but for the sins of others; he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our sins; he was stricken for the transgressions of his people; he died for their sins, according to the scriptures (Isa. 53:5,8; 1 Cor. 15:3). 3.

Thirdly, The effects of the sufferings and death of Christ, or the things procured thereby, are many. As, 3a. The redemption of his people from sin, from Satan, from the curse and condemnation of the law, and from wrath to come; which is through his blood, his sufferings, and death: he gave his flesh for the life of the world of his elect; and gave his life a ransom for them; and being made perfect through sufferings, became the author of salvation to them (Eph. 1:7; John 6:51; Matthew 20:28; Heb 2:10; 5:9). 3b.

Reconciliation, which is by the death of Christ; and peace, which is made by his blood; even a complete atonement for sin; which is obtained through Christ's being a propitiation for it, which he is, through his blood; that is, his sufferings and death (Rom. 3:25; 5:10; Col. 1:20). 3c. Pardon of sin; which is a branch of redemption, through the blood of Christ, which was shed for the remission of sin; and without shedding of blood there is no remission (Eph. 1:7; Matthew 26:28; Heb. 9:22). 3d.

Justification, which is sometimes ascribed to the blood of Christ; that is, to his sufferings and death; the consequence of which is, deliverance, and security from wrath to come (Rom. 5:9). 3e. In short, the complete salvation of all God's elect: Christ came to gather together the children of God that were scattered abroad, by dying for them to seek and to save that which was lost; even to save all his people from their sins, by finishing transgression, making an end of sin, making reconciliation for iniquity, and

bringing in everlasting righteousness; and by obtaining an entire conquest over all enemies, sin, Satan, and death, and hell (John 11:51,52; Matthew 1:21; Dan. 9:24). 3f.

In all which the glory of God is great; the glory of his mercy, grace, and goodness; the glory of his wisdom, truth, and faithfulness; the glory of his power, and the glory of his justice and holiness. 4. Fourthly, The properties of Christ's death and sufferings. 4a. They were real; and not imaginary, or in appearance only: as he really became incarnate, so he really suffered and died; which was confirmed by the testimony of the centurion, and the soldiers that guarded him; by his hands, feet, and side being pierced, and the prints of these being seen after his resurrection. 4b.

They were voluntary; he willingly agreed in council and covenant to undergo them; he came readily into the world, in the time appointed for that purpose; and was earnestly desirous of, and even straitened until they were accomplished; he freely surrendered himself into the hands of his enemies; and cheerfully laid down his life, and resigned his breath. 4c. They were necessary: he ought to suffer; he could not be excused from suffering; because of the decrees of God; the covenant and agreement he entered into with his Father; the prophecies concerning them; and the types and figures on them.

Besides, the redemption and salvation of his people could not be procured in any other way. 4d. They were efficacious, or effectual to the purposes for which they were endured; as redemption, reconciliation, &c. which efficacy they had from the dignity of his Person, as the Son of God; hence his blood cleansed from all sin; and his righteousness justified from all; and it is unto all, and upon all them that believe, to the justification of them; and his sacrifice is of a sweet smelling savor with God; and a full and proper atonement for the sins of men.

For, 4e. They are expiatory and satisfactory. The sufferings of saints are by way of fatherly chastisement; but they have no efficacy to expiate sin, or make atonement for it. But Christ's sufferings, through the infiniteness of his Person, are a complete atonement for all the sins of his people; by his sacrifice and death he has put away sin for ever, and perfected for ever them that are sanctified. ENDNOTES:

[1] De sear Num. Vindict. p. 554.

[2] Valer. Maxim. l. 2, s. 7. s. 12. it is called the grave of servants, Plaut. Miles, 2, 4, 19. "Pone crucem servo," Juvenal. Satyr. 6. v. 248.

[3] As Cicero in Orat. pro Rabirio.

[4] Sueton. Vit. Jul. Caesar. c. 74.

[5] It is called "arbor infelix," in Cicero *ibid.* "abire in malam crucem," is often used as a curse by Plautus, vide Parei Lexic. Plant. in voce crux.

[6] "Ita quidem ut brevis passio Christi aeternae damnandorum aequipolleat," Witsius in Symbol. Exercit. 15. s. 16.

[7] Of Christ's enduring the same sufferings his people should, and undergoing the same punishment threatened in the law, see Dr. Owen, Exercit. 5. on Heb. vol. 2. p. 80, &c. and his *Vindiciae Evangel.* c. 26. s. 28. p. 564, &c.

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