

LEARNED FROM WHAT HE SUFFERED: AN EXAMINATION OF THE USE OF
ΜΑΘΕΙΝ-ΠΑΘΕΙΝ IN HEBREWS 5:8

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Introduction

The author of Hebrews' comment in 5:8 that "Son though he [Jesus] was, he learned obedience from what he suffered" has become a common crux in New Testament interpretation. Confusion often surfaces when trying to understand how Jesus *learned obedience* and how his suffering played a role in this process. Added to the complexity of the verse is the identification of a common Greek wordplay being used in reference to Jesus. This wordplay (μαθεῖν – to learn; παθεῖν – to suffer)¹ has a long history in Greco-Roman literature and was often used to communicate a common maxim: one learns through times of suffering. Most commentaries and studies on this verse identify this wordplay, but few examine the Greco-Roman literature or attempt to account for how it functions within the discourse.² Most scholars appeal to two definitive studies on the wordplay—both written in the mid-1950s and yet to be translated into English. Heinrich Dörrie published a study in German of the use of the pun μαθεῖν-παθεῖν in Greco-Roman literature; the French scholar Jean Costé published a similar study that dealt more directly with Hebrews 5:8.

This paper will take another look at the relevant Greco-Roman literature in order to trace the use of μαθεῖν-παθεῖν up to the time that the Epistle to the Hebrews was written.³ The first part of this paper will argue that by the time of the composition of Hebrews the wordplay had taken

¹ μαθεῖν and παθεῖν are the aorist active infinitive forms of μαθηάω and πάσχω. I have chosen to refer to them in this form to give emphasis the assonance commonly created by the pairing of these two words.

² For examples of this, see the section 'Recent Hebrews Scholarship' below.

³ This study makes no claims at pinpointing an exact date for Hebrews' composition. Rather it surveys the literature into the early 2nd century CE (which well past the latest dates attributed to Hebrews).

on a proverbial status and would therefore have been well known by its author and audience. While there was no fixed meaning attached to the wordplay, it had often been used to communicate two popular adages: 1) a fool learns by way of suffering, and 2) learning through suffering is a reality of the human condition. The goal of this first section is to argue that it is highly probable that the author of Hebrews incorporated a widely known wordplay into his letter—one that often carried certain connotations. To show this, I will first revisit the works of Dörrie and Costé alongside more recent Hebrews scholarship. Next, attention will turn to the Greco-Roman literature that incorporates the *μαθεῖν-παθεῖν* wordplay. It will be shown that the concept of “educative suffering” was widespread and commonly expressed through the juxtaposition of these two words. This section will also argue that this wordplay was a fixed formula by the 3rd century BCE and took on a proverbial status. Further, it will be shown that its use appealed either to the adage of the fool who learns by suffering or to a general aphorism concerning all humanity.

The first part of this paper will show that *μαθεῖν-παθεῖν* was an established wordplay by the time of Hebrews’ composition, but this does not dictate how the author incorporated it into his letter. Therefore, the second half of this paper will look at the specific use of *μαθεῖν-παθεῖν* in Hebrews 5:8. It will be argued that the context of the epistle—including the immediate linguistic co-text of the passage—dictates how the wordplay is being used (and what it means). As such, the argument of Hebrews (with relation to 5:8) will be examined. Next, the linguistic environment surrounding the wordplay will be analyzed to show how its meaning is constrained. It will be argued that the wordplay in Hebrews 5:8 is used to demonstrate how it is that Jesus meets the requirements of the role of high priest. By applying this common wordplay with

reference to the human condition (the second common use mentioned above), the author of Hebrews stresses Jesus' humanity and his ability to empathize with those he serves.

Previous studies on the μαθεῖν-παθεῖν wordplay

In 1956, Heinrich Dörrie released a study on the use of μαθεῖν-παθεῖν in Greek thought.⁴ Words that sound similar, Dörrie argues, were commonly understood in the Greek consciousness to have similar meanings.⁵ He then traces the use of μαθεῖν-παθεῖν in Greek literature—drawing upon Aristotle, Herodotus, Aeschylus, Plato and others. Through this examination, Dörrie shows how both words moved through a distinct development in their connotation. Early use of these words pointed to a proverbial notion that a foolish person requires suffering in order to become wise, while the wise person is more cautious. In this early meaning, suffering is always difficult (usually for punishment) and there is no sense of μαθεῖν as a maturing process.⁶ These words, he argues, moved in a narrow sense to the emotional and, later, to the discovery of personality. Further, there was no sense in these words of justification or maturity.⁷ However, Dörrie highlights the use of μαθεῖν-παθεῖν in Greek tragedies in which suffering is used by the divine to correct a person (or people) and, as a result, that person comes to understand the world order and its laws.⁸ Dörrie highlights Aeschylus specifically as developing this concept with religious connotations (that a supreme being is trying to teach something through suffering).⁹

⁴ H. Dörrie, 'Leid und Erfahrung: Die Wort- und Sinn -Verbindung παθεῖν - μαθεῖν im griechischen Denken', *Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur* 5 (1956) 303–44.

⁵ Dörrie, 'Leid und Erfahrung', 307.

⁶ Dörrie, 'Leid und Erfahrung', 339: 'Sondern das Leid ist immer schwer und grausig ; es ist unbarmherzig hart und bis an die Grenze der Vernichtung drückend ; fast immer ist es Strafe. An ihm bewährt sich weder stille Einfalt noch edle Größe. Und auch das μαθεῖν darf nicht als ein Reifungs-Vorgang, als ein Erreichen der Entelechie.'

⁷ Dörrie, 'Leid und Erfahrung', 338–39.

⁸ Dörrie, 'Leid und Erfahrung', 340. 'Schmerz und Qual, Not und Strafe sind das letzte Mittel, durch das die Gottheit den Menschen gewaltsam korrigiert; gegen seinen Willen bringt sie ihn zur Anerkennung dieser Weltordnung und ihrer Gesetze.'

⁹ Dörrie, 'Leid und Erfahrung', 338.

A year before Dörrie's study, Jean Costé published a study on the use of educative suffering in Greek and Jewish literature with reference to the use of ἔμαθεν-ἔπαθεν in Hebrews 5:8.¹⁰ He devotes special attention to the pun μαθεῖν-παθεῖν (and their equivalents). Costé establishes that the notion of educative suffering existed before the use of this pun, but Greek thought "easily cast this idea into a well-known paronomasia that adapted it beautifully."¹¹ Costé, like Dörrie, surveys Greek literature to establish the use of this paronomasia. He notes that the negative aspect of this saying was more firmly established in the literature:

The pun ἔμαθον ἔπαθον remained dependent as a whole in this background of religious ideas to be found, in various forms, slightly throughout Greek literature and which teach the man the instability of his mortality, basic truth which only a painful experience can really teach. The most beautiful texts themselves are not devoid of bitterness.¹²

Costé next traces the theme of educational suffering through the Old Testament—looking at wisdom literature, the book of Job specifically, and the prophets. He reaches the conclusion that, in this literature, one learns from suffering a new dimension of religious life. Through suffering, one is prepared to learn from God. As Costé summarizes: Suffering was for the Greek a school; for a believing Jew it was qualifying, which, in unexpected ways, prepares one to be open to the lessons of the Master.¹³ Finally, Costé looks at the work of Philo—who made extensive use of the wordplay μαθεῖν-παθεῖν. In Philo, Costé argues, there is not a far-reaching discussion of the educative value of suffering. Rather, Philo emphasizes *experience* in intellectual work and the

¹⁰ J. Costé, 'Notion grecque et notion biblique de la 'souffrance éducatrice,' ', *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 43 (1955) 481–523. The two studies seem to have been written independently of each other as neither one references the other.

¹¹ Costé, 'Notion grecque', 486. All translation of Costé's article are my own.

¹² Costé, 'Notion grecque', 496.

¹³ Costé, 'Notion grecque', 508.

mystical journey of the soul.¹⁴ Further, according to Costé, the pun lost some of its bite in Philo as *πάσχω* shifted from “suffering at trial” to the idea of “living experience.”¹⁵

In the conclusion to his study, Costé makes some comments on the use of *ἔμαθεν-ἔπαθεν* in Heb 5:8.¹⁶ First, as might be obvious, Costé points out that the author of Hebrews did not invent this wordplay but was taking over a stylistic device with a long history in Greek literature. Second, the Christology in Hebrews prevents us from ascribing to the epistle the use of the paronomasia in paganism. As Costé points out, the Greek literature assumed a subject in the initial state of imperfection and that can not be assumed of Christ as his pre-existence with the Father is clearly stated (Heb 1:2; 3:6; 4:14; 12:3, 28). Third, Costé argues that Philo may have impacted Hebrews on a literary level, but his use of *μαθεῖν-παθεῖν* does not seem to fit theologically with Hebrews.¹⁷ Finally, Costé argues that Hebrews’ use of the pun does not find direct interpretive precedent in the Old Testament either. So, he states, Hebrews’ use is unique and interpretation should focus on the context.¹⁸

Recent Hebrews Scholarship

The studies by Costé and Dörrie have remained definitive in Hebrews scholarship with reference to the use of *ἔμαθεν-ἔπαθεν* in 5:8 of the epistle. Recent commentaries on Hebrews rely upon Costé and Dörrie and do not spend much time developing the theme. Many commentators cite these two previous studies alongside various citations of the Greek literature to establish the wordplay in Hebrews.¹⁹ Few commentators spend much time asking why the author of Hebrews

¹⁴ Costé, 'Notion grecque', 517.

¹⁵ Costé, 'Notion grecque', 517.

¹⁶ Costé, 'Notion grecque', 518–22.

¹⁷ Costé, 'Notion grecque', 518–20.

¹⁸ Costé, 'Notion grecque', 521–22.

¹⁹ See F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 130 n67; P. Ellingsworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 291; C.R. Koester, *Hebrews* (New York: Doubleday, 2001)

would incorporate such a wordplay—especially in reference to Jesus. Luke Timothy Johnson, however, writes that Hebrews uses this wordplay as “another way of asserting the close and sympathetic relationship of the Son to other humans.”²⁰ In his commentary, William Lane states that from the perspective of Philo’s use of the pun, the application to Jesus is daring.²¹ Lane argues that Greek literature is not the key to understanding 5:8, but *ἐπάθεν* should be understood as “suffered death.” Thus, “Jesus learned experientially what obedience entails through his passion to achieve salvation and to become fully qualified for his office as eternal priest.”²²

Harold Attridge’s commentary probably best develops this theme and applies it to 5:8. Attridge draws upon Costé and Dörrie and argues that the author of Hebrews does not seem to be borrowing the pun in the same connotations as Philo or Greek literature. Attridge emphasizes the paraenetic role of the proverbial wordplay.²³ By using this pun, Attridge argues, the author of Hebrews is appealing to his audience: “Jesus is presented as one who ‘learns obedience’ in the midst of suffering because that is what the addressees are called upon to do.”²⁴ Craig Koester follows Attridge and writes that Hebrews’ use of a common idea “enhances the argument rhetorically.”²⁵ As such, the author is shaping the way that the audience should see their own situation.²⁶

290; P.T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) 200; J.W. Thompson, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008) 116.

²⁰ L.T. Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006) 147.

²¹ W.L. Lane, *Hebrews* (Dallas: Word Books, 1991) I:121.

²² Lane, *Hebrews*, I:121.

²³ H.W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989) 153.

²⁴ Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 153.

²⁵ Koester, *Hebrews*, 299.

²⁶ Also, D.A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "To the Hebrews"* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 192.

Other scholars have written on the use of ἔμαθεν-ἔπαθεν in Heb 5:8. N. Clayton Croy draws upon the work of Costé and Dörrie in his survey of suffering in Greek literature.²⁷ Like Attridge, Croy connects Jesus learning through suffering to the circumstances of the original audience. He writes: “The author of Hebrews, within his own theological framework, affirms something very similar [to the writing of Aeschylus]. No one evades suffering, not even God’s own Son, so certainly not God’s human children.”²⁸ David Peterson, in his monograph *Hebrews and Perfection*, draws upon Costé’s article as he interprets Heb 5:8. Peterson summarizes Costé’s argument and includes another Old Testament precedent to the theme of educative suffering: the concept of suffering in consequence of being a mediator.²⁹ Like Lane, Peterson articulates that Jesus learning through suffering prepares him for his role as high priest.

Survey of Greco-Roman literature

This section will briefly survey the Greco-Roman literature that incorporates the wordplay μαθεῖν-παθεῖν. To provide a proper foundation, this survey will look first at the concept of educational suffering found in Greek writing. After this, Greco-Roman literature that incorporates the wordplay μαθεῖν-παθεῖν will be examined.³⁰ The majority of works consulted in this section were composed before the epistle to the Hebrews—while a few from the 2nd century CE are referenced.

²⁷ N.C. Croy, *Endurance in Suffering: Hebrews 12:1-13 in its Rhetorical, Religious, and Philosophical Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1998) 139–44.

²⁸ Croy, *Endurance in Suffering*, 207.

²⁹ D. Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1982) 93–94.

³⁰ This section will build upon the material presented in both Costé and Dörrie’s studies on the use of μαθεῖν-παθεῖν. Further examples were found by performing searches for μαθεῖν and παθεῖν (and their cognates) in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* digital library of Greek literature (www.tlg.uci.edu). The TLG corpus includes over 10,000 works associated with over 4,000 authors from as far back as the 8th century BCE.

The concept of educational suffering existed long before the connection of μαθεῖν-παθεῖν appears in Greco-Roman literature.³¹ Learning through suffering was understood negatively to show that a foolish person was eventually taught due to his or her own stupidity.³² In the *Iliad*, for example, Menelaus intimidates his opponent Euphorbus in an attempt to avoid a duel by reminding him that “even a fool learns by event” (ῥεχθὲν δέ τε νήπιος ἔγνω).³³ A similar idea is expressed by Hesiod in *Opera et dies* (217–18) when he tells Perses, his brother:

ὁδὸς δ' ἐτέρηφι παρελθεῖν κρείσσων ἐς τὰ δίκαια·
Δίκη δ' ὑπὲρ ὕψιρος ἴσχει ἐς τέλος ἐξελοῦσα.
Παθῶν δέ νήπιος ἔγνω.

*The better path is to go on the other side toward justice.
Justice triumphs over disproportion when her time has come.
But the fool learns when he has suffered.*

An example from Plato makes it clear that the concept of the fool learning by suffering held proverbial weight by the 4th century BCE. In *Symposium* 222b, Alcibiades provides a warning to Agathon:

ἄ δὴ καὶ σοὶ λέγω, ὦ Ἀγάθων, μὴ ἐξαπατᾶσθαι ὑπὸ τούτου,
ἀλλ' ἀπὸ τῶν ἡμετέρων παθημάτων γνόντα εὐλαβηθῆναι,
καὶ μὴ κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν ὥσπερ νήπιον παθόντα γνῶναι.

*And I say this to you, Agathon, so you are not deceived by him,
but from our suffering you may know to be cautious,
and not as the fool who comes to know by suffering according to the adage.*

The notion that the fool learns by suffering was an established aphorism or adage (τὴν παροιμίαν) by the time Plato was writing.³⁴

³¹ Costé writes that this notion is “probably as old as humanity itself” (“est probablement aussi vieille que l’humanité elle-même”) and that it would be pointless to attempt to fix when it first appeared in time (Costé, 'Notion grecque', 482).

³² See Croy, *Endurance in Suffering*, 139–40.

³³ Costé, 'Notion grecque', 483. Croy comments: “Even at this level the expression achieves the status of a proverb” (Croy, *Endurance in Suffering*, 140).

³⁴ Dörrie points out that the “adage” referred to here is the use in *Iliad* noted above (Dörrie, 'Leid und Erfahrung', 315).

The juxtaposition of μαθεῖν-παθεῖν appears as early as Aesop's fables in the 6th century BCE. The conclusion to the fable of the Dog and the Butcher (ΚΥΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΜΑΚΕΛΛΕΥΣ) reads: ὁ μῦθος δηλοῖ, ὡς ἐν τῷ παθεῖν τις ἐπισπᾶται τὸ μαθεῖν καὶ προσεκτικῶς ἔχειν (the fable is clear, as in this case, to suffer someone knows to learn and to have patience). Other fables end with a similar moral: ὁ μῦθος δηλοῖ ὅτι πολλάκις τὰ παθήματα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις μαθήματα γίνονται (the fable is clear that often sufferings become lessons for people).³⁵ The use in these fables highlights μαθεῖν-παθεῖν as a general rule or proverb: suffering provides an opportunity to learn. There is not a connection to the foolish, but the learning that comes by suffering is established as a part of life.

Another early use of this juxtaposition appears in the writing of Herodotus, a fifth-century BCE historian.³⁶ In *Histories* 1.207, Croesus of Lydia speaks from his experiences as he advises King Cyrus on how to respond to Tomyris' army. While Cyrus' advisors encourage him to let Tomyris and her army into Persia, Croesus advises him in the other direction. In preparation for his advice, Croesus tells the King: τὰ δέ μοι παθήματα, ἐόντα ἀχάρिता, μαθήματα γέγονε (My misfortunes, being unfavorable, have become my lessons). Croesus' point is that his past experiences have taught him a great deal so that now he can wisely advise the King. In this use, the connection between learning and suffering is not established in relationship to the foolish. Rather, Croesus argues that these experiences have made him a wiser counsel than the king's advisors.³⁷

³⁵ Hausrath, *Corpus Fabularum Aesopicarum*. Fables 134 and 233 (located in the *TLG*). This statement has a variety of forms, yet all retain παθήματα and μαθήματα.

³⁶ Dörrie, 'Leid und Erfahrung', 310. Dörrie maintains that this is the earliest use of μαθεῖν-παθεῖν. He surprisingly does not include Aesop's fables in his discussion.

³⁷ Croesus' advice ends up being disastrous for Cyrus—which calls into question how "wise" his counsel really was.

Similar uses from other historians can be found in the writings of Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Appian of Alexandria.³⁸ In *Antiquities Romanae*, Dionysius tells of Coriolanus' speech to his army: ἐκ μεγάλου ταπεινὸς γενήσομαι, καὶ τὰ μὰ παθήματα παιδεύματα γενήσεται τοῖς ἄλλοις (8.33). As Croy points out, this use differs from that of Herodotus in that μαθήματα is replaced by παιδεύματα and the lessons learned from suffering are for others and not Coriolanus himself.³⁹ Later, in 8.52, Dionysius uses the language of educative suffering in the comments of Veturia to his son Marcus: [...] ἐκ πολλῶν ἀκοθσμάτων τε καὶ παθημάτων μαθούση (From many stories and much suffering, I learned). Appianus, writing in the second century CE, describes Tigranes placing Mithridates in charge of their army, thinking that his misfortunes (παθήματα) had been lessons (διδάγματα) for him (*Mithridactica*, 13.87). In this instance, μαθήματα is replaced with διδάγματα, but the same concept is expressed.

In the 4th century BCE, Demosthenes (*de Corona Trierarchiae*, 15.5) articulates the connection of μαθεῖν-παθεῖν as a well-known concept when he says: τῶν μὲν τοίνυν ιδιωτῶν τοὺς παθεῖν μανθάνοντας ἀπροσκέπτους ὀνομάζομεν (Those in private life who learn only through suffering we call lacking foresight). Here it is clear that the connection between “learning by suffering” and the foolish was still a common use of this proverbial idea. However, the use of this wordplay did not always bring this association. Menander, the Greek dramatist of the 3–4 century BCE, wrote (*Fragmenta* [Kock], 553.2):

ἐὰν πονηροῦ γείτονος γείτων ἔση,
πάντως παθεῖν πονηρὸν ἢ μαθεῖν σε δεῖ.
ἐὰν ἀγαθοῦ γείτονος γείτων ἔση,
ὥς προσδιδάσκεις ἀγαθὰ καὶ προσμανθάνεις

³⁸ Dörrie sees these two historians as drawing directly upon Herodotus: “Diese Herodotstelle wird zweimal ganz ersichtlich nachgeahmt und damit in gewissem Sinne interpretiert” (Dörrie, 'Leid und Erfahrung', 322); Croy thinks that Dörrie overstates the connection (Croy, *Endurance in Suffering*, 141 n157).

³⁹ Croy, *Endurance in Suffering*, 141.

*If you have a wicked neighbor
you must in every way suffer or learn what is wicked.
If you have a good neighbor
you will both teach and learn what is good.*

This example, which was not examined in the previous studies, uses the wordplay μαθεῖν-παθεῖν as the author establishes a contrast between having good and wicked neighbors. In both cases learning takes place, however in one scenario learning happens by teaching and in the other by suffering. Further, the learning by suffering is brought not by the learner's foolishness, but by their bad circumstances.

A significant example comes from the 3rd century BCE. A fragment from Sotades, a poet and satirists, acts as a parody of the juxtaposition of μαθεῖν-παθεῖν:

*εἰ μετὰ τὸ μαθεῖν
οὐκ ἦν παθεῖν, ἂ δεῖ παθεῖν, δεῖ γὰρ μαθεῖν·
εἰ δεῖ παθεῖν με, κἂν μάθω, τί δεῖ μαθεῖν;
οὐ δεῖ μαθεῖν ἄρ' ἂ δεῖ παθεῖν· δεῖ γὰρ παθεῖν.*

*If after learning,
one does not suffer what it was necessary to suffer. For it is necessary to learn.
If it is necessary for me to suffer, even if I learn, why is it necessary to learn?*

Sotades' repeated use of παθεῖν and μαθεῖν seems to establish the juxtaposition of these two terms as an established formula. It certainly draws upon the assonance (rhyming of vowel sounds) and consonance (rhyming of consonants) embedded in this wordplay. As such, Sotades can play with the form to achieve the element of satire.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Dörrie places this satirical poem within the context of learning astrology and, with it, a view of the world as determined. Thus, Sotades is calling this assumption into question and implies a non-deterministic view of the world (Dörrie, 'Leid und Erfahrung', 319–20).

As has been highlighted in previous studies, the connection between learning and suffering is best seen in ancient Greek tragedies.⁴¹ This wordplay is impressively stated in the writing of Aeschylus. In *Agamemnon*, he writes that Zeus “has established a fixed rule that learning (μάθος) comes by suffering (πάθει)” (177–78). Later, Aeschylus writes, “Justice provides learning to those who suffer (παθοῦσιν μαθεῖν)” (250). Here learning through suffering is established as a law of the human condition and the requirement to designate the divine government.⁴² Sophocles also develops the connection between learning and suffering. In *Oedipus Coloneus*, he has Oedipus say: στέργειν γὰρ αἰ πάθαι με χῶ χρόνος ξυνὼν μακρὸς διδάσκει καὶ τὸ γενναῖον τρίτον (My sufferings, the long time I have lived and, third, my nobility teach me to love/be happy). While our wordplay is not incorporated here (instead using διδάσκω), the connection between suffering and learning is made clear. Elsewhere, however, Sophocles does use the wordplay to make a similar connection. In *Trachiniae*, Deianeira proclaims: πεπθσμένη μὲν, ὡς ἀπεικάσαι, πάρει πάθημα τοῦμόν· ὡς δ’ ἐγὼ θυμοφθορῶ μητ’ ἐκμάθοις παθοῦσα (You have heard of my trouble, I believe, and that brought you here; but the anguish which fills my heart—may you never learn it by suffering).

Philo

Philo of Alexandria applies the wordplay μαθεῖν-παθεῖν in a variety of contexts. As a Hellenistic Jew writing around the same time as the author of Hebrews, a brief survey of his use of μαθεῖν-παθεῖν is warranted.⁴³ At a basic level, Philo uses this pun to demonstrate the common

⁴¹ Croy, *Endurance in Suffering*, 141: “Tragedy is the genre where the pairing of suffering and learning comes to full flower.” Cf. Dörrie, ‘Leid und Erfahrung’, 338: “Nur die Tragödie, genau genommen nur Aischylos, hat darüber hinaus den Gedanken gefaßt, daß eine höchste Macht den Menschen durch Leiden etwas lehren will.”

⁴² Costé, ‘Notion grecque’, 493.

⁴³ Costé makes too much of the relationship between Hebrews and Philo. He essentially assumes that the author of Hebrews was directly influenced by Philo—although not with his use of μαθεῖν-παθεῖν (Costé, ‘Notion grecque’, 508; 519).

knowledge acquired through experience. In *Specialibus Legibus* 4.29, Philo writes that a person responsible for a fire should pay for the damage so that from his suffering he might learn (ἴν' ἐκ τοῦ παθεῖν μάθη). In *Mosis* 2:280, Philo presents Moses confronting Korah, Dathan and Abiram by saying, “by suffering (παθόντες) they will learn (εἴσονται) my truth since they would not know it by learning (μαθόντες).” Here these three individuals must learn through personal suffering and pain.

Elsewhere, Philo compares learning (ἐμαθον) by experience (παθοῦσα) to a fool (ἄφρων) and an untrained child (νήπιος παῖς) (*Heres* 73). This use is closer to the Greek adage that the fool (νήπιος) learns through suffering. What is learned in this context is to stand back and attribute the powers of the world to God. In this last example we can trace a theme in Philo’s thought that “learning from experience/suffering” often is necessary for understanding the divine.⁴⁴ In *Somniis* 2:107, Philo writes that Joseph, having learned accurately from his experience (ὁ παθὼν ἀκριβῶς ἐμαθεν) cries out that he belongs to God. Further, discussing the Israelites and the manna in Exodus 16, Philo writes that:

For God showers down wisdom from above to the minds of all those clever by nature and fond of contemplation, but those seeing and tasting it are very much delighted and learn (ἐμαθον) from what they experience (ἐπαθον), yet do not know from where it comes (*Fuga* 0:263).

Again, experience lends itself to learning about the things of the divine.

In Philo, often the concept of learning through suffering is softened to mean learning through experience. This is presented as a way in which one learns basic knowledge from everyday life (*Specialibus Legibus* 4.29). This theme is also used in reference to acquiring wisdom or knowledge of the divine (*Fuga* 0:263). Philo maintains the Greco-Roman concept of

⁴⁴ Costé calls this the “experiences of the soul” (Costé, 'Notion grecque', 511–14).

knowledge or understanding coming from personal suffering (*Moysis*, 2:280). Therefore, Philo was not limited to one particular use of this theme or of the wordplay *μαθεῖν-παθεῖν*. It sometimes applies to the fool (*Heres* 73) or the wicked (*Moysis* 2:280), but also to Joseph (*Somniis* 2:107) and the Israelites (*Fuga* 0:263). Also, we can conclude along with Costé that as *πάσχω* shifted from *suffering* to *experience*, as represented in Philo, the wordplay “lost some of its bite.”⁴⁵

Conclusion

This brief survey of Greek literature allows us to make some concluding observations. First, it is clear that the concept of learning through suffering has a long history and most likely did not begin with Homer’s *Iliad*. Further, that the fool learns through suffering was an established maxim by the time of the literature surveyed. This is made clear by Plato’s reference to the adage of the fool learning by suffering (*Symposium*, 222b). Second, *μαθεῖν-παθεῖν*, probably due to its assonance and consonance, became a common way to express this established theme. That a fool learns by suffering was sometimes communicated using this pun (Demosthenes, *de Corona Trierarchiae* 15.5). Yet, the juxtaposition of *μαθεῖν-παθεῖν* was not limited to this meaning and was often used to express the fairly old notion that what one suffers can be a learning experience. Uses by Aesop and others show that *μαθεῖν-παθεῖν* was used to summarize a basic truth about the human condition.

Third, it seems apparent that while the use of *μαθεῖν-παθεῖν* was not the only way to communicate the established notion of learning through suffering it did itself become a fixed proverbial form. The way that Sotades plays with the formula by the 3rd century BCE suggests that it was already a conventional wordplay at that time. Fourth, Greek tragedies used *μαθεῖν-παθεῖν* to communicate a “fixed rule” of the human condition—yet also emphasizing the divine

⁴⁵ Costé, 'Notion grecque', 517

truth which might be acquired through suffering. Finally, the use of the pun by Philo in the first century CE reveals the range of meanings in which it could communicate. It was still understood to express the path that a fool takes for learning (*Heres* 73), but it also was applied to the journey of understanding the divine (*Somniis* 2:107). Further, Philo often seems to soften the meaning of *πάσχω* to designate experience rather than suffering.

Hebrews 5:8

Approaching the author of Hebrews' use of *μαθεῖν-παθεῖν*, one must be careful in how the history of this pun enlightens the interpretation of this specific use. There is no one-for-one connotation between these words and their appearance within a certain context. This should be clear from the range of meanings found within the Greek literature surveyed above. There was no one meaning that attached itself to every appearance of *μαθεῖν-παθεῖν*. Further, the author of Hebrews does not seem to be quoting any specific text or appealing to any particular use of the phrase in 5:8. Therefore, while an understanding of how this pun was understood in Greek literature will provide some insight, there are other significant influences upon an interpretation of Hebrews 5:8.

First, the author's use of *μαθεῖν-παθεῖν* should be understood within the context of the argument of Hebrews. Put differently, literary and rhetorical features of the letter are significant indicators of what the author was attempting to communicate in 5:8. Second, the verse must be read within its linguistic co-text. That is to say that certain aspects of the letter of Hebrews—especially what immediately precedes and follows this verse—constrain what *ἔμαθεν-ἔπαθεν* can mean. Finally, with an understanding of how *ἔμαθεν-ἔπαθεν* in Hebrews 5:8 functions within the epistle we can begin to understand how this established wordplay is functioning with the text. For this step we can draw upon our understanding of the term in Greek literature.

The Argument of Hebrews

The author's use of ἔμαθεν-ἔπαθεν in 5:8 is in the middle of a contained unit (5:1–10), which is itself a subunit of the larger section of 4:11–6:3.⁴⁶ This section is introduced by three hortatory subjunctives in 4:11–16 (σπουδάσωμεν, κρατῶμεν, προσερχώμεθα) that serve as a summary of the previous section and as a peak in the discourse.⁴⁷ 5:1–10 shifts attention to Jesus as high priest—a concept that will be picked back up with greater detail in 7:1–10:18. In 5:1–4 the author provides a description of the Levitical priesthood and establishes the requirements of a high priest. In 5:5–10 the attention shifts to Jesus in order to develop his qualifications as a high priest in the order of Melchizedek. The next subunit, 5:11–14, shifts the focus to the recipients of the letter while remaining concerned with the topic of Jesus' high priesthood and Melchizedek.⁴⁸ Here the author prepares the audience for this new teaching regarding Jesus. The last subunit, 6:1–3, again makes use of the hortatory subjunctive and serves to encourage the recipients and connects this unit to the next (6:1–7:3).

5:1–4 makes clear that a high priest must 1) be able to empathize with those he represents (vv. 1–3); and 2) be called by God (v. 4).⁴⁹ 5:3 reveals a limitation of every high priest in the past: they had to offer sacrifices for their own sins. Jesus, the great high priest, was without sin (4:15) and here his superior qualifications begin to be fleshed out. This looks ahead to 7:27 when the author will make the point clear: "Unlike other high priests, he does not need to

⁴⁶ This study is indebted to the discourse analysis of Hebrews by Cynthia Long Westfall. Of this section, see C.L. Westfall, *A Discourse Analysis of the Letter to the Hebrews: The Relationship Between Form and Meaning* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005) 141–51. This section (4:11–6:3) is itself a subunit of 4:11–7:28.

⁴⁷ Westfall, *Discourse Analysis*, 142.

⁴⁸ Westfall, *Discourse Analysis*, 144.

⁴⁹ Attridge points to three general points of comparison being made between 5:1–4 and vv. 5–10 by adding that the high priest's basic function is to make atonement for sin. This is expressed at the end of 5:1 and compared to Jesus' salvific function expressed in vv. 9–10 (Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 143).

offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sin once for all when he offered himself."⁵⁰

In 5:5–10, the author responds to the two qualifications for "every high priest" in reverse order:⁵¹ verses 5–6 use quotations from Psalms 2 and 110 (109) to make Jesus' divine calling as a priest in the order of Melchizedek clear; vv. 7–10 communicate his ability to empathize with those he serves. The author quotes Psalm 2:7, which was the first scripture quoted in Hebrews 1:5. Psalm 110 was quoted in the opening chapter as well, but here verse 4 is used rather than verse 1. These two quotations "represent Christ being called by God through direct speech" and "grammaticalize interpersonal intimacy and directness in the Father's appointment of the son."⁵² Hebrews 5:7 has been the subject of numerous interpretations and debates.⁵³ However one understands the content of Jesus' prayer or how it was "heard," there is a striking parallel between the high priest who offers (προσφέρειν) sacrifices for his own sin (5:3) and Jesus (who is without sin—4:15) offering up (προσενέγκας) prayers and petitions. The author makes clear that this takes place during Jesus' time on earth (ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ)—which extends into 5:8.

Therefore, the author's point that Jesus ἔμαθεν ἀφ' ὧν ἔπαθεν τὴν ὑπακοήν in Hebrews 5:8 is placed in the middle of a discussion on Jesus' high priesthood. Further, in vv. 7–10, the author is attempting to demonstrate how it is that Jesus fulfills the requirement that a high priest must be

⁵⁰ All Scripture passages taken from the TNIV translation.

⁵¹ Many scholars like to present 5:1–10 as a chiasm: G.H. Guthrie, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998) 192; Lane, *Hebrews*, 111; Thompson, *Hebrews*, 114; B. Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Hebrews, James and Jude* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2007) 196–97. A chiasmic structure dictates that emphasis is placed on the center elements. However, the discourse does not peak in the middle of this unit but rather builds to an apex at the closing verses.

⁵² Westfall, *Discourse Analysis*, 144.

⁵³ For an overview of the various proposed answers to these questions, see H.W. Attridge, "Heard Because of His Reverence' (Heb. 5:7)", *JBL* 98 (1979) 90–93; Ellingsworth, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 286–91; Koester, *Hebrews*, 288–89; N.R. Lightfoot, "The Saving of the Savior: Hebrews 5:7ff", *Restoration Quarterly* 16 (1973) 166–73; and J. Swetnam, "The Crux at Hebrews 5:7-8", *Biblica* 81 (2000) 347–61.

selected from among the people (5:1) and be able to empathize with those he represents (5:2–3).

The quotations from the psalms have already established that Jesus was called by God—as

Aaron and the other high priests were (5:4).

Linguistic Constraints

This section will take into consideration how the immediate co-text (or linguistic environment) constrains what ἔμαθεν-ἔπαθεν can mean in Hebrews 5:8. As we have seen, these two words used together have not only a long history of use, but also a range of meanings and applications. Modern views of how meaning is conveyed provide helpful tools in analyzing what meaning a word or phrase has in a given co-text.⁵⁴ Of relevance here will be an analysis of the linguistic environment of ἔμαθεν-ἔπαθεν 5:8 and how its co-text constrains which meaning is being conveyed.

In the previous section, the larger context of the argument surrounding Hebrews 5:8 was examined to provide a foundation for how this passage should be interpreted. In this section, we will limit our analysis to the passage itself: *καίπερ ὢν υἱός, ἔμαθεν ἀφ' ὧν ἔπαθεν τὴν ὑπακοήν* ('Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered'). Four key terms within Hebrews 5:8 jump out for further analysis. First, the comment that Jesus learned through suffering *although he was a son* merits an investigation into the concept of sonship in Hebrews. Second, the idea that Jesus *learned* will be examined to provide some insight into how it should be understood in this context. Third, the notion that Jesus *suffered* is an established concept by this point in the discourse (2:9–10) and will limit what ἔπαθεν means (especially the shift in meaning identified in Philo). Last, since the author notes that *obedience* was learned through suffering, an investigation into this concept in Hebrews will also be helpful.

⁵⁴ See J. Lyons, *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1968) 97. Also M.A.K. Halliday and R. Hasan, *Cohesion in English* (London: Longman, 1976) .

Sonship is a significant theme in Hebrews and is established right away as the author writes that in the past God spoke through the prophets, but “in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (1:2). The term *υἱός* is the predominate title for Jesus up to this point in Hebrews (1:5, 8; 2:6, 10; 3:6; 4:14; 5:5). The Son, the author writes, “is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word” (1:3). The Old Testament is cited to act as direct speech identifying Jesus as God’s Son (1:5; 5:5). The identification of Jesus as God’s *υἱός* designates a special relationship. The title communicates that Jesus’ honor derives from the honor of the Father.⁵⁵ Elsewhere in Hebrews the Christian community is referred to as sons/children of God. 2:10 states that part of Jesus’ salvific act involved bringing many *υἱοὺς* to glory. In 12:5–11, the community is told to endure hardships as divine discipline. This is supported by the statement that “God is treating you as his sons/children (*ὡς υἱοῖς*)” (12:7).

The phrase *καίπερ ὢν υἱός* brings to 5:8 all that has been said of this status up to this point in the discourse. That is to say that the author is making clear that despite the fact that Jesus enjoyed this status, he still learned obedience through what he suffered.⁵⁶ Given the application of the term *υἱός* to the Christian community elsewhere in the epistle (especially with relation to hardships and suffering in 12:5–11), this phrase has implications for the community as well. If learning and suffering are not inconsistent with the status of “son” for Jesus, then, too, the believer should not expect to avoid hardships—indeed the author argues that such hardships serve as validation of their status as sons/children of God (12:8).⁵⁷ At the same time, Jesus’ sonship is unique to him and carries with it a high Christology in Hebrews (as seen in the

⁵⁵ deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 85.

⁵⁶ Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 152.

⁵⁷ Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 173.

opening verses). Given what is said about the Son up until this point, it is unacceptable to attach to the use of ἔμαθεν-ἔπαθεν in 5:8 the popular notion of the fool who learns from suffering.

Given this high Christology, it is difficult to understand how Jesus could *learn* anything—is he not the eternal Son who “is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being” (1:3)? Yet, it seems that this is the exact contrast that the author of Hebrews is attempting to make. One might expect that the status of Son would exempt Jesus from such human requirements. Yet, “Son though he was”—bringing all that has been said about the Son up until this point back into view—Jesus learned obedience through suffering. This makes sense once it is understood that Jesus in his full humanity is being appealed to here.⁵⁸

The reference to suffering itself (ἔπαθεν) in 5:8 has certain constraints to its meaning in light of its use elsewhere in the discourse. In 2:9, πάσχω is used in reference to Jesus’ death while 2:10 seems to broaden the term to include general suffering (used in the plural—παθημάτων).⁵⁹ While many scholars restrict ‘suffering’ throughout the epistle to mean only Jesus’ passion and crucifixion,⁶⁰ the wider context of Hebrews presents a broader meaning. In 2:18, πάσχω is used in connecting Jesus’ suffering with temptation. Even here in 5:8, ἔπαθεν seems to point to more than simply Jesus’ death. The relative pronoun (ὧν) modifying ἔπαθεν implies that Jesus learned through the *things* (plural) he suffered.⁶¹ Further, if Jesus was to have “learned obedience,” then it would seem that the author is referring to more than the final moments of the passion events.⁶²

⁵⁸ The implications that Jesus learned *obedience* will be further explored below.

⁵⁹ Talbert argues that 2:10 has in mind the “whole web of suffering through which Jesus passed through in his lifetime.” C.H. Talbert, *Learning Through Suffering: The Educational Value of Suffering in the New Testament and Its Milieu* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1991) 61.

⁶⁰ Ellingsworth, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 161; Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 107.

⁶¹ Ellingsworth, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 292.

⁶² Johnson, *Hebrews*, 149.

This is not to say that *πάσχω* does not refer to Jesus' death—the connection between Jesus' suffering and death are made clear throughout the epistle (2:10; 9:26; 12:2–3; 13:12). Rather, his violent death is the culmination of the many sufferings he faced and endured while on earth. This is certainly a part of what is alluded to in 5:8, but the meaning of *ἔπαθεν* cannot be restricted to mean only Jesus' death.⁶³ That said, the meaning of *ἔπαθεν* can not be limited to mean something along the lines of Philo's use of the term to mean "experience." Throughout the epistle, *πάσχω/πάθημα* is used to express physical or emotional suffering rather than more general experiences. As just mentioned, it is linked to Jesus' death. It is also used to describe the specific sufferings that the Christian community addressed in Hebrews went through (10:32–34). In this passage the author describes the "great contest of suffering" (*πολλήν ἀθλησιν παθημάτων*) experienced by the community. This involved public insult (*ὀνειδισμοῖς*) and persecution (*θλίψεσιν*). Further, the author describes them "suffering with" (*συνεπαθήσατε*) those in prison (*τοῖς δεσμίοις*) and having their property stolen (*τὴν ἀρπαγὴν τῶν ὑπαρχόντων ὑμῶν*).

At this point it may also be beneficial to draw attention to the understanding of the positive result of enduring through suffering that was present in the writings of the early Christian church.⁶⁴ In the epistle of James, for example, the recipients are encouraged to "consider it joy" when they "face trials of many kinds." This is because such testing of their faith "produces perseverance" which leads to them being "mature and complete" (1:2–4). In 1 Peter, the author reminds the recipients that while they have had "to suffer grief in all kinds of trials," such has happened so that their faith "may be proved genuine and may result in praise" (1:6–7). This idea is also expressed by Paul in his letter to the Romans: "[W]e also glory in our sufferings

⁶³ Contra Lane, *Hebrews*, I:121.

⁶⁴ Dr. Cynthia Long Westfall pointed out this trajectory within early Christianity to me and helped with fleshing out what its implications are for this study.

(θλίψεσιν), because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope” (5:3–4). A part of the teaching in the early church was this understanding that endurance through suffering leads to growth and godly characteristics. The author of Hebrews expresses a similar idea in 12:11—that discipline (understood as hardships in v. 7) “produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” Therefore, the author of Hebrews’ comment about learning obedience by suffering is not distinctive. However, the application to Jesus—and not the believer—was entirely unique. There is no way to say with confidence that the author of Hebrews was familiar with these early Christian letters (although it is clear from 13:23 that there was a connection to Timothy). At the same time, it is entirely plausible that this trajectory of thought was picked up by the author of Hebrews—possibly even impacting how the μαθεῖν-παθεῖν wordplay was being used.

Finally, the identification that what Jesus learned through suffering was obedience (ὕπακοήν) again impacts how one should interpret this phrase. Taken on its own, this phrase could indicate that Jesus moved from disobedience to obedience through the things he suffered. This, however, cannot be what is meant since the author has already emphasized that Christ was without sin (4:15).⁶⁵ Further, 10:5–10 makes clear that Jesus was obedient to the Father’s will from the start of his time on earth.⁶⁶ Rather, Jesus “learned obedience” in the sense that “he comes to appreciate fully what conformity to God’s will means.”⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Here we could also reiterate what has previously been said concerning Christ’s sonship. That is to say that the author of Hebrew’s high Christology also argues against such an interpretation of 5:8.

⁶⁶ Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 153.

⁶⁷ Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 153; See also Koester, *Hebrews*, 299.

Ellingworth points out that ὑπακοή denotes a positive response to a spoken call.⁶⁸ The noun is only used here in Hebrews while its cognate ὑπακούω appears twice in the epistle (5:9; 11:8). Given the scarcity of the term, the close proximity of ὑπακούω in 5:9 makes it highly significant for understanding ὑπακοήν in 5:8. After stating that Jesus learning obedience through suffering, the author continues: “and, once made perfect, he [Jesus] became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey (ὑπακούουσιν) him.” There is an obvious connection between the obedience that Jesus demonstrated and the obedience that defines the follower of Christ. As Koester comments, “His [Jesus’] obedience is the basis for Christian obedience.”⁶⁹ This connection (as well as that behind the terms πάσχω and υἱός) highlights the paraenetic nature of the author’s statement in 5:8.

Concluding Observations

After a brief survey of the use of μαθεῖν-παθεῖν in Greek literature and an examination of the argument and linguistic co-text surrounding the author’s use of this pun in Hebrews 5:8, we can now make some concluding observations:

1. It is clear from Greek literature that the concept of “learning through suffering” was established early on and that the wordplay μαθεῖν-παθεῖν became a popular way to express it. It is also clear that such educative suffering was commonly linked to the foolish person who had to experience such suffering in order to gain any wisdom. Before the appearance of the pun μαθεῖν-παθεῖν, the notion of the fool learning through suffering as a well-known proverb or adage. Thus, we can agree with Costé when he writes that the author of Hebrews did not invent this wordplay,

⁶⁸ Ellingsworth, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 294. Louw and Nida provide the definition ‘to obey on the basis of having paid attention to.’ J.P. Louw and E.A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 2nd ed. 1989) I:468.

⁶⁹ Koester, *Hebrews*, 290.

but took over a well-established literary device that was well attested in Greek literature.⁷⁰ We can take this even further and comment that this wordplay was so well known in Greek literature (and the concept of educative suffering in Greek culture) that the recipients of this letter would have identified the use in 5:8 as such.

2. The satirical use of the *μαθεῖν-παθεῖν* form by Sotades suggests that this was a fixed formula by the 3rd century BCE. It can reasonably be assumed that by the time of the composition of Hebrews in the late 1st century CE it was understood as a fixed proverbial form. We can with certainty attest to its continued use right up to the time of Philo—even as we notice several nuances in meaning. As shown by Sotades, the set form of *μαθεῖν-παθεῖν* allowed for authors to be innovative in their use and application of the paronomasia. Since there is no direct parallel to the use of *μαθεῖν-παθεῖν* by the author of Hebrews, we have some ground upon which to understand the use in 5:8 as innovative.

3. While it should be maintained that the author of Hebrews' use of *μαθεῖν-παθεῖν* is innovative and unique, this statement should be qualified. What is unique about this use is that the author applies this wordplay to Jesus. The notion that suffering brought about learning was not new (as was clear in the Greco-Roman literature); neither is the concept that endurance in suffering produces good qualities and outcomes (a common theme in the early Christian writings). However, these two trajectories of thought seem to converge in Hebrews 5:8 as the author applies *μαθεῖν-παθεῖν* to Jesus. This would have had a startling effect on the original audience. The author's application of *μαθεῖν-παθεῖν* to Jesus Christ is therefore significant in and of itself and would have been an attention-grabbing rhetorical device.

⁷⁰ Costé, 'Notion grecque', 518.

4. Since the wordplay is associated with Jesus Christ in Hebrews 5:8 it is constrained in its meaning. Given the author's high Christology (attached to the status of 'Son' in 1:2–3 but also expressed in 4:15), it is difficult to understand this wordplay being used with the strongly attested association with the fool.⁷¹ However, the other strong thread of meaning attached to *μαθεῖν-παθεῖν* in Greco-Roman literature was of a description of the human condition. This was seen in several of the morals from Aesop's fables and in the writing of Aeschylus (*Agamemnon*, 177–78). This general idea—that the wordplay *μαθεῖν-παθεῖν* expresses a truism for all people—could very easily have been picked up by the author of Hebrews and applied to Jesus Christ.

5. In fact, understood in this general way, this meaning of *μαθεῖν-παθεῖν* fits in nicely with the argument of Hebrews 5:1–10. As we have seen, in this section the author spells out the qualifications of a high priest (5:1–4) and shows how Jesus meets such requirements (5:5–10). When the author applies the wordplay to Jesus in 5:8, it is to show how he meets the requirement of one who can empathize with those he represents as high priest. Thus, in stating that Jesus learned from what he suffered, the author is attributing a common maxim associated with all of humanity to Jesus. Therefore, it is being shown that Jesus (despite his status as God's Son) learned through suffering just like everyone else. There is an emphasis on Christ's humanity in the author's use of *μαθεῖν-παθεῖν*—further identifying him as one who can empathize with humankind (a point also made clear in 2:11, 14, 17–18; 4:15).

6. Finally, we can point to the points of connection between Jesus and the community being addressed (especially through the terms *υἱός*, *πάσχω*, and *ὑπακοήν*) to conclude that the use of *μαθεῖν-παθεῖν* in 5:8 takes on a paraenetic role. This conclusion comes alongside the work of

⁷¹ Costé, 'Notion grecque', 520. Costé also argues that the high Christology in Hebrews prevents an interpretation of Jesus growing in virtue (518).

Attridge, Koester and others who highlight this aspect of Hebrews 5:8.⁷² While the wordplay is directed at Jesus, it has implications for the Christian community who has faced (and is potentially facing) suffering (10:32–34; 12:7); are identified as God’s children (12:5–11) and are called to similar obedience (5:9). That Jesus “learned obedience through what he suffered” serves as motivation for the audience to view their own circumstances in a similar light and to look to Jesus as a model of one who endured through suffering (12:2–3).

Conclusion

Hebrews 5:8 will most likely continue to be a difficult passage for biblical theologians and scholars. This paper has attempted to bring some clarity to how the author of the epistle incorporated a popular wordplay from Greco-Roman thought and literature into the discussion of this important verse. Or, possibly more importantly, it has attempted to place some limitations upon what this pun can mean in light of its use in Greco-Roman literature and its constraints within its literary co-text. It was argued that the author of Hebrews borrowed a well-known literary device used to communicate the popular notion of ‘learning through suffering.’ Yet, the author applied it in a highly significant way to Jesus Christ as a way to establish his qualifications as a high priest who is able to empathize with those he represents. This was both innovative in its application, yet completely in line with the argument of the letter and the teaching of the early Christian church.

⁷² Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 153; Koester, *Hebrews*, 299; Also Croy, *Endurance in Suffering*, 207.