

# TETELESTAI-Paid in Full

## TETELESTAI "IT IS FINISHED" "PAID IN FULL"

**MEDITATION ON "IT IS FINISHED"** (John 19:30+) which can also be translated "PAID IN FULL!" THREE words in English, ONE word in Greek – TETELESTAI! The GREATEST WORD from the GREATEST MAN on the GREATEST DAY in all eternity! One word, but no word ever uttered has so changed the history and destiny of mankind. In Latin tetelestai is rendered with two words "Consummatum est" (It is consummated!) Jesus spoke 7 times on the Cross (Lk 23:34+; Jn 19:36+; Lk 23:42+; Mt 27:46-[note](#); Jn 19:28,30+, Lk 23:46+). TETELESTAI was Jesus' next to last word and was followed by "Father, INTO THY HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT." (Lk 23:46+). "IT IS FINISHED!" "Yes, indeed/Finished, ev'ry jot/Sinner, this is all you need/Tell me, is it not?" (Ira Sankey)

As **C H Spurgeon** says TETELESTAI conveys

"an ocean of meaning in a drop of language, a mere drop. It would need all the other words that ever were spoken, or ever can be spoken, to explain this one word. It is altogether immeasurable. It is high; I cannot attain to it. It is deep; I cannot fathom it. IT IS FINISHED is the most charming note in all of Calvary's music. The fire has passed upon the Lamb. He has borne the whole of the wrath that was due to His people. This is the royal dish of the feast of love."

**J C Ryle** wrote that

"It is surely not too much to say, that of all the seven famous sayings of Christ on the cross, none is more remarkable than TETELESTAI."

**A C Gaebelein** adds

"Never before and never after was ever spoken ONE WORD which contains and means so much. It is the shout of the mighty Victor. And who can measure the depths of this ONE WORD!"

**A W Pink** writes that

"Eternity will be needed to make manifest all that TETELESTAI contains."

**Matthew Henry** described TETELESTAI as a "comprehensive word and a comfortable one."

**Charles Simeon** adds that

'since the foundation of the world there never was a single word uttered, in which such diversified and important matter was contained. Every word indeed that proceeded from our Saviour's lips deserves the most attentive consideration: but TETELESTAI eclipses all. To do justice to it, is beyond the ability of men or angels: its height, and depth, and length, and breadth, are absolutely unsearchable.'

Clearly to contemplate TETELESTAI is to come to the realization that "the place whereon we stand is holy ground." May the Holy Spirit help us to comprehend and to handle rightly "this text which is at once so small and yet so great!"

It has been well said that Christ's RESURRECTION is the Father's "AMEN" to His Son's declaration "IT IS FINISHED." Looking at the Cross we see the work of redemption completed. Looking at the open tomb we see Jesus' finished work fully accepted by the Father. The payment required for sin is death (cf Ge 2:17+, Ro 5:12+, Ro 6:23+) and when Christ said TETELESTAI, He was saying that the sin debt was "PAID IN FULL!" If you believe that dear reader, His righteousness has been credited to your account (Ro 4:3+, Ro 4:24+, Gal 3:6-7+). We owed a debt we could never pay. Jesus paid a debt He did not owe! Tony Evans says "All the funds necessary to pay for our total redemption were put up by Jesus Christ on the Cross." Or as Warren Wiersbe put it "He took my bankruptcy and covered it with His solvency." He didn't just make a down payment and then expect me to keep up the installments. "But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Hebrews 9:26+). His empty tomb and His resurrection are indisputable testimony to the fact that the Father accepted His Son's payment for sin on our behalf, as our Substitute. Thus TETELESTAI is not a cry of defeat of a dying Man, but a cry of triumph of a Living, Life Giving Redeemer, a divine proclamation that the WORK OF REDEMPTION had been fully, finally and forever accomplished (cf Jn 4:34+, Jn 17:4+).

"What a grand utterance (is "Tetelestai")! Now are we safe, for salvation is complete. The (sin) debt was now, to the last farthing, all discharged. The atonement and propitiation were made once and for all and forever, by the one offering made in Jesus' body on the Tree. There was the cup; Hell was in it; the Savior drank it—not a sip and then a pause—not a draught (a single act of drinking) and then a ceasing. He drained it till there is not a dreg left for any of His people. The great ten-throated whip of the Law was worn out upon His back. There is no lash left with which to smite one for whom Jesus died. The great cannonade ("continuous heavy gunfire") of God's justice has exhausted all its ammunition—there is nothing left to be hurled against a child of God (Beloved, do you believe these great benefits are yours in Christ?). Sheathed is thy sword, O Justice! Silenced is thy thunder, O Law! There remains nothing now of all the griefs and pains and agonies which chosen sinners ought to have suffered for their sins, for Christ has endured all for His own beloved (1Th 1:4+) and IT IS FINISHED. Christ has paid the debt which all the torments of eternity could not have paid. Once again—when He said, "IT IS FINISHED," Jesus had totally destroyed the power of Satan, of sin and of death. The Champion accepted the challenge to do battle for our soul's redemption against all our foes. He met Sin. Horrible, terrible, all-but omnipotent Sin nailed Him to the Cross. But in that deed, Christ nailed Sin also to the tree. There they both did hang together—Sin and Sin's Destroyer. Sin destroyed Christ and by that destruction Christ destroyed Sin."

**TETELESTAI** is the perfect tense (see below) of the verb *teleo* which is derived from *telos* (a goal achieved, a consummation, a result attained) and means to bring something to a successful end to or to its intended or destined goal. It does not mean just to complete a task but to carry it out fully, to bring it to the finish or to perfection. It follows that Jesus' cry of TETELESTAI is a word of finality. The idea is "It is finished, it stands finished, and it always will be finished!" His work of redemption is complete and nothing needs to be or can be added to it. Sin is atoned for (Heb 9:12+, Heb 10:12+), Satan is defeated and rendered powerless (Heb 2:14-15+, 1Jn 3:8+, see Schemes of the Devil), every requirement of the Law has been satisfied and God's holy wrath against sin has been satisfied (or propitiated) (Ro 3:25+, Heb 2:17+, 1Jn 2:2+, 1Jn 4:10+). Redemption is eternally secured. We are reconciled in Christ's "fleshly body through death" that we might be presented before God "holy and blameless and beyond reproach." (Col 1:22+). Speaking of Christ's cry of TETELESTAI, Frank Boreham makes the interesting observation that "This divine self-satisfaction appears only twice, once in each Testament. When He completed the work of Creation, He looked upon it and said that it was "very good," (Ge 1:31+) when He completed the Work of Redemption, He cried with a loud voice TETELESTAI! (Jn 19:30) It means (in essence) the same thing."

**THE PERFECT TENSE: TETELESTAI** is in the **perfect tense** which describes a PAST completed act with PRESENT effect, emphasizing that the past completed event of Christ's death on the Cross has ongoing, even permanent effects. Jesus' sacrifice may have occurred in time and space, but its results will last for eternity! In other words, when Jesus declared "IT IS FINISHED", He was saying that His mission to redeem sinners had reached its intended goal and that the benefits to the redeemed would last throughout eternity. Erwin Lutzer adds that "This means that my sins are on Jesus, not on me. Yes, there is sin within me but not on me. My sinful nature keeps luring me toward sin, and even in my best moments my works are tainted with selfish motives. But legally, I am accepted on the basis of the merit of Jesus. Figuratively speaking, I have a new set of clothes and a clear record in heaven. The righteousness of Jesus has been (forever) credited to my account." All that truth in one Greek tense! Beloved our Redeemer's ransom payment is sufficient for this life and the life to come! May God enable us by His Spirit, to live victoriously in light of the truth of this "Word of the Cross" (especially the great word "tetelestai") which is the "power of God" to us "who are being saved (daily by the Spirit)" (1Cor 1:18+).

**Observe how the word TETELESTAI was commonly used in the ancient world:**

**(1) SERVANTS:**

Servant used TETELESTAI when reporting to their master, "I have COMPLETED (TETELESTAI) the work assigned to me". In another ancient secular Greek text we read of the example of a father sending his son on a mission. The son was not to return until he had performed the last act of the mission. When he did return from a successful mission, he used the word TETELESTAI to report to his father that he had accomplished the goal. As Jesus Himself testified "I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to ACCOMPLISH (*teleioo* - also derived from *telos* = goal) His work. I glorified Thee on the earth, having ACCOMPLISHED (*teleioo*) the work which Thou hast given Me to do. (And so He laid) down His life for His friends." (Jn 6:38<sup>+</sup>, Mk 10:45+, Jn 4:34+, Jn 17:4<sup>+</sup>, Jn 15:13<sup>+</sup>)

**(2) PRIESTS:**

Priests would examine animals for blemishes before they were sacrificed. If the lamb was faultless, perfect, and acceptable, the priest would say, "TETELESTAI!" Jesus is the Lamb of God Who alone was "without sin" (Heb 4:15+, cf Jn 1:29+, 1Cor 5:7+). As Peter testifies we "were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ." (1Pe 1:18-19+)

### (3) ARTISTS:

Frank Boreham writes that "When the painter or the sculptor had put the last finishing touches to the vivid landscape or the marble bust, he would stand back a few feet to admire his masterpiece, and, seeing in it nothing that called for correction or improvement, would murmur fondly, 'Tetelestai!' 'Tetelestai!'" "IT IS FINISHED!" All the Old Testament "pictures" (types) of Messiah were fulfilled in Christ and were only a "shadow of what is to come; but the substance (reality) belongs to Christ." (Col 2:17+). The death of Jesus on the Cross "finished the picture" of redemption, a masterpiece which had been in the Father's heart "from before the foundation of the world" (1Pe 1:20+, 2Ti 1:9+).

### (4) MERCHANTS:

In ancient times when a promissory note was paid, the one holding the note wrote "TETELESTAI" across it. A deed to property was not in effect until it was dated and signed, and when this was accomplished, the clerk wrote "TETELESTAI" across the deed. When someone had a debt and it was paid off, the creditor would write "TETELESTAI" on the certificate of debt signifying that it was "PAID IN FULL". It is reported in several secondary sources that several years ago, archaeologists digging in Egypt uncovered the "office" of an ancient "CPA." In this office they found a stack of bills, with the Greek word "**tetelestai**" inscribed across each bill - "**Paid in full**!" (See next paragraph which gives historical support for the interpretation of tetelestai as "paid in full.") When Christ gave Himself on the Cross, He fulfilled all the righteous demands of the law and our "sin debt" was PAID IN FULL. The OT sacrifices covered sin but could never take sin away. Jesus accomplished what all of the old covenant sacrifices could not do. "In eternity the Son gave the Father a "promissory note" that He would pay the price for humanity's redemption (see Heb 10:5-7+). On Calvary the note was PAID IN FULL. TETELESTAI!" (H H Hobbs) As **Spurgeon** said "There is no mortgage on the saints." **Wayne Grudem** adds that "If Christ had not paid the full penalty, there would still be condemnation left for us. But since he has paid the full penalty that is due to us, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Ro 8:1+).

**Documentation of Use of Tetelestai Meaning Paid in Full** - Some writers question whether **tetelestai** was ever used which the meaning "**paid in full**", stating that while this is frequently quoted as a fact, no original ancient sources are ever given. That is a fair critique, but I think there is Greek papyri evidence to support this common explanation as recorded in the following 1896 work by Grenfell and Hunt entitled [New classical fragments and other Greek and Latin...](#)

On [page 78](#) we have a section entitled '**L. Second Third Century A. D. From the Fayoum**' (Fayoum is in Egypt) where we read that "The 14 papyris grouped together are **receipts** for various taxes **paid** by persons transporting goods on baggage animals from the Fayoum to Memphis and vice versa across the desert road."

**Continuing on page 79** we read "The formula in these 14 papyri is with some variations as follows. It begins with the abbreviation **tetel.** (which in one case, *f2*, written out in full, **tetelestai**) **dia pules** ("through the gate"), followed by the name of the village; then comes the name of the tax of which there are three varieties, etc. ([page 79](#))

This ancient manuscript substantiates that **tetelestai** was occasionally used to mean "paid in full" in secular (commercial) settings.

**(5) PRISONERS: FYI** - While the following illustration of Tetelestai is "attractive" and sounds Biblically reasonable, I have been unable to document that this description was the actual practice in Roman prisons. Therefore one might want to either ignore this illustration or use it as an illustration but with a qualifying explanation. The esteemed pastor Adrian Rogers used this illustration in at least five messages, but unfortunately he did not reference a specific resource.

When a Roman citizen was convicted of a crime, he was thrown into prison. A "Certificate of Debt" listing all his crimes was nailed to his cell door so that anyone passing by could know what he had been accused of and the penalty assessed. When the prisoner had served his sentence and was released from bondage, the indictment was taken down from the door and the judge who had put him in prison would sign the indictment

and write across it the word TETELESTAI. The freed prisoner was then given this document and if questioned as to why he was out of jail, he could point to the indictment across which the judge had written TETELESTAI. He could rest in safety and security because the word TETELESTAI guaranteed his deliverance and his liberty. The charges for those crimes could never again be brought against him. He would never be a victim of "double jeopardy" (having to pay for the same crime twice). When Jesus cried "TETELESTAI" on the cross, He was saying that anyone who places his trust in His sacrificial death on their behalf, receives in essence a "certificate of debt" with the inscription of "tetelestai", indicating that all their "crimes" (past, present and future) against God have been PAID FOR IN FULL! In light of this truth, Paul could write that because our debt was PAID IN FULL by Jesus, God "has forgiven you all your sins: Christ has utterly wiped out (Greek = completely obliterated) the condemning evidence of broken laws and commandments which always hung over our heads, and has completely annulled it by nailing it over His own head on the Cross. And then having drawn the sting of all the powers ranged against us, He exposed them, shattered, empty and defeated, in His final glorious triumphant act!" (Col 2:14-15+ Phillips) Erwin Lutzer adds that "On the cross, the justice of God was fully satisfied when our heavenly Substitute paid the great price of ransom. As Spurgeon put it, we can stand with confidence despite the thunder of the law and the lightening flash of justice, "for we are safe beneath the cross." He paid the very last cent of the wages of our sin."

Beloved, Satan may accuse us of "high treason" against God (read Rev 12:10+; see Schemes of the Devil), but now and forever "we have an Advocate (paraclete) with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous" (1Jn 2:1-2+) Who cries "I object" to every accusation of the Adversary, to which the Father says "Objection Sustained!" Yes, when we sin, we need to confess and repent in order to enjoy fellowship with God (1Jn 1:9+), but our eternal salvation is never in doubt or subject to "double jeopardy" because Christ has once and for all time cried "**TETELESTAI**!" Beloved child of God, if you have a sin regarding which you find it difficult to accept the Father's full forgiveness, let your mind dwell on the truth of "**TETELESTAI**," and then put that sin on God's ledger and write "Paid in Full" next to it! The truth inherent in the word **TETELESTAI** should give every believer great assurance, comfort and peace that all of our sin debt, past, present and future, is PAID IN FULL and there remains no sacrifice to be paid! There is nothing we must or even could contribute to the remission of our debt, except receive the "free gift of eternal life" by faith (Ro 6:23b+). Jesus "having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God." (Heb 10:12-note). As the hymn writer E M Hall put it "Jesus paid it all, All to Him I owe; Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow."

**Andrew Murray** writes that

"every day that our confidence grows fuller in Christ's FINISHED WORK must see our heart more entirely yielding itself like Him, a whole burnt offering in the service of God and His love."

**Spurgeon** says that

"The general religion of mankind is "DO," but the religion of a true Christian is "DONE." IT IS FINISHED is the believer's conquering word. INCARNATE LOVE has fulfilled His self-imposed task. Jesus, as the Substitute for sinners, was condemned to die, and He died that He might finish the work of our redemption. Your sins have sustained their death-blow, the robe of your righteousness has received its last thread (cf 1Cor 1:30+, 2Cor 5:21+). It is done, complete, perfect. It needs no addition; it can NEVER suffer any diminution. Oh, Christian, do lay hold of this precious thought. I may not be able to state it except in weak terms, but let not my weakness prevent your apprehending its glory and its preciousness. This thought is enough to make a man leap, though his legs were chained with irons, and to make him sing, though his mouth were gagged. We are PERFECTLY ACCEPTED in Christ, and our justification is not partial (cf Ro 5:1+, Ro 5:9-note, Ro 8:30-note). It does not go to a limited extent, but goes the whole way. Our unrighteousness is covered. From condemnation we are entirely and irrevocably free. 'Consummatum est. The work is done, redemption is accomplished; the salvation of My people is forever secured. Sin will never be mentioned against them anymore, forever. Oh, wondrous deed of Deity! Oh, mighty feat of love accomplished once for all!"

**J C Ryle** encourages us to REST our souls on the finished work of Christ (Heb 4:10-11-note) noting that

"We need not fear that either sin or Satan or law shall condemn us at the last day. We may lean back on the thought, that we have a Savior Who has done all, paid all, accomplished all, performed all that is necessary for our salvation. We may take up the challenge of the Apostle, "Who is the one who condemns? (cf Ro 8:1-note) Christ Jesus is He Who died, yes, rather Who was raised, Who is at the right hand of God; Who also (continually) intercedes for us." (Ro 8:34-note). When we look at our own works, we may well feel ashamed of their imperfections. But when we look at the FINISHED WORK of Christ, we may feel peace (cf Heb 12:2-note)." Hallelujah!

## Spurgeon

"Christ has said, "IT IS FINISHED!" and we must cease to work too (Ro 4:3-note), not only with our hands but with our souls—working no more for life, for that is given; working no more for justification, for that is concluded; but to-day RESTING in Christ (cp Ro 4:5-6-note, Mt 11:28-30-note) for "It is finished!" There is nothing for God to do. "IT IS FINISHED." There is nothing for you to do. "IT IS FINISHED." Christ need not bleed. "IT IS FINISHED." You need not weep. "IT IS FINISHED." God the Holy Spirit need not delay because of your unworthiness, nor need you delay because of your helplessness. "IT IS FINISHED." Every stumbling block is rolled out of the road; every gate is opened. The bars of brass are broken, the gates of iron are burst asunder. "IT IS FINISHED." Come and welcome; come and welcome!."

This is exactly what the great missionary **Hudson Taylor**, founder of China Inland Mission, did as he meditated on "IT IS FINISHED" writing that "There dawned upon me the joyous conviction that since the whole work was finished and the whole debt was paid upon the Cross there was nothing for me to do but to fall upon my knees, accept the Savior and praise Him forevermore." Amen!

And since the work of redemption is finished by and in Christ, now based on the fact that we are God's "workmanship (**poiema** = masterpiece! See [Believers Are God's Masterpiece, His Poiema](#)), created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them," our goal should be to daily seek to enter into His works, works that so to speak have already been "pre-paid" and "pre-pared" in Christ, even before the foundation of the world! (Eph 2:10-note, Eph 1:4-note, cp Heb 4:3-note, 1Cor 3:11) This great truth should relieve us of some of the pressure we often feel in evangelical Christendom to "perform" and should give us the freedom to learn to rest in what the Spirit of Christ can do through us when we are totally surrendered to His will. Yes, we will still have to "labor and strive" just as did Paul (Col 1:29-note), but now it is working out what the Spirit of Christ works in (Php 2:12-note, Php 2:13-note).

The evangelist **Alexander Wooten** was approached by a young man who asked, "What must I **DO** to be saved?" Wooten replied "It's **too late**!" The young man became alarmed asking "Do you mean that it's too late for me to be saved? Is there nothing I can **DO**?" Wooten replied "Too late! It's already been **DONE**! (IT IS FINISHED!) The only thing you can **DO** is BELIEVE."

Therefore, beloved, the same principle holds for the works prepared beforehand in Christ Jesus in which we now are to daily walk (Eph 2:10-note) The only thing we can "**do**" is BELIEVE! The same way we got through the small gate and onto the narrow way (Mt 7:13-14-note), is the same way we are now to work for (in) Jesus -- by faith, motivated by love. As Paul exhorted the saints at Colossae who were being "tempted" by false teachers to veer off the narrow path of liberating grace and into the rut of futile legalism (Col 2:20-23-note), he also exhorts us - "As you therefore have **received** Christ Jesus the Lord, so **walk** in Him." (Col 2:6-note) **Walk** is in the **present imperative**, a command calling for this to be our lifestyle... continually! **BUT** be careful! To "try" to do this in our own strength is doomed to failure. The Good News (the Gospel) is that for every divine commandment, He also provides divine enablement. How? The **dunamis** of the indwelling Spirit (cp Acts 1:8-note). Now we need to learn to lean on Him, continually jettisoning "self-reliance" and continually cultivating a "spirit" of "Spirit-dependence. Study also the two intimately related commands to continually "**Be filled** with the Spirit" (Eph 5:18-note) and to continually "**Walk** by the Spirit" (Gal 5:16-note). Notice also how Paul was able to labor [to point of exhaustion! = **kopiaio**] and strive in agony [**agonizomai**] in Col 1:29 (noting that Paul uses **dunamis** to describe "His power"! ) Now, back to Col 2:6 - How did we **receive** Him? **By faith**. How do we now daily **walk** in Him? **By faith**! How should we daily **work** for Him? **By faith**! **Remember...**

**It is done!**  
**Tetelestai!**  
**Finished!**

Lifted up was He to die,  
"It is finished," was His cry;  
Now in heaven exalted high;  
Hallelujah! what a Saviour.  
-Phillip Bliss

## Related Resources:

- [Trial & Crucifixion of Jesus-Parallel Passages](#) - chart of this great event in time and eternity
- [Hallelujah, What a Savior - Shelly Moore Band](#)