

## *Observations on a Colloquy*

The colloquy in question is the In-Depth Studies Colloquy: ‘Is the Cross Alone Sufficient for Salvation?’, which was held on the 29th of April 2017 at the Gilbert Regional Library, Phoenix.<sup>1</sup> Brian Arnold took the ‘No’ position and Geoff Volker took the ‘Yes’.

The issue under debate was the old question of Christ’s active/passive obedience. Is Christ’s life of obedience under the law imputed to those who believe, so that the justified sinner is both cleansed from his sin in the blood of Christ (in simple terms, the passive obedience of Christ) and accounted righteous, made positively righteousness, having received the imputation of Christ’s perfect obedience under the law (in simple terms, the active obedience of Christ)? Brian argued ‘Yes’; Geoff argued ‘No’.

I want to make a very brief response. And I mean brief. Having already written on this subject,<sup>2</sup> I will only touch on what I see as a few key points raised by the colloquy.

To avoid all misunderstanding, let me say at once that I wholeheartedly agree with both Brian and Geoff that this is an in-house debate between brothers. This is not a wrangle. I publish this article entirely in accord with this spirit.

Again, as the two men agreed, there are many issues here which are held in common. We all believe in imputation. We all believe that Christ lived a perfect life, fulfilling all righteousness under the law, and we believe that this perfection was absolutely necessary in order that he might be an unblemished sin-offering on the cross. We also agree that the terms ‘active obedience’ and ‘passive obedience’ are, in some ways, unhelpful, since Christ was active on the cross in his so-called passive obedience. Nevertheless, we are stuck with these terms, and so we have to get on with it. But, to contradict myself a little, since it is agreed that Christ was actively

---

<sup>1</sup> It may be found at the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8B6rXRFBNA>

<sup>2</sup> See my ‘Into the Lions’ Den: Christ’s Active Obedience Re-Visited’.

obeying his Father on the cross, this, it seems to me, means that it is wrong to dismiss all talk of Christ's active obedience.

So, these key points that I spoke about...

***'Active obedience is a theological, not a biblical, construct'***

I am, of course, quoting one of Geoff's arguments.

Let me say at once that Geoff has put his finger on what I consider to be a major issue. In all sorts of areas, far too many believers read the Bible and interpret it in terms of a Confession or systematic theology. They wrest Scripture to fit their system. Let me give a couple of examples of the sort of thing I mean, issues that I have written about, and done so extensively:

1. Election, particular redemption and the free offer of the gospel.
2. The covenants, the law and the believer.

In both of these areas, far too many read the Bible to make it fit their system, rather than the other way about. The results of this tinkering with Scripture are disastrous. We must let God be true and (if necessary) every man and his Confession or system fall. Of course, nearly everybody will agree with the sentiment, but, as I say, in practice far too many work the other way round: Scripture is distorted to fit the system.

Is this the case with 'the active obedience of Christ'? If it is, if Scripture is distorted to make it fit a system, then the concept should be abandoned forthwith.

But there is a difference between 'biblical' and 'textual'. We all agree that there is no specific text which states that 'the active obedience of Christ, his perfect obedience to the law, is imputed to sinners when they believe'. No! But does this mean that we must, therefore, abandon the concept? Before we do, let us try the notion on one or two other topics.

Is there a specific text which states that the Godhead is One in Three persons? No!

Is there a specific text that states that the sinner is justified by faith alone? No!

Is there a specific text that states that believers are under the law of Christ? No!<sup>3</sup>

Shall we, therefore, abandon the doctrine of the trinity, the doctrine of the justification of believers by faith alone, and the claim that believers are under the law of Christ? No! For all three are *biblical* doctrines even though they are not *textual* doctrines.

The question is of course: Is the imputation of Christ's active obedience a biblical doctrine? I assert that it is, but I will not argue the case here, having already done so in my aforementioned article.

### ***'Justification is forgiveness'***

This, it seems to me, is where Geoff ends up.

But is justification simply forgiveness? Or, as it came out in the colloquy, is the righteousness imputed to the believer defined as 'cleansing' or 'a clean slate'? Let me say immediately that by asking this question I intend no disparagement of forgiveness. How could I? It features so largely in the apostolic writings. But is the righteousness imputed to the believer limited to 'cleansing' or 'a clean slate'?

I think not. Notice Paul's direct comparison – better, contrast – of 'a righteousness... that comes from the law' with 'that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith' (Phil. 3:9); that is, through Christ. Does he mean 'a clean slate... that comes from the law' with 'that which comes through faith in Christ, the *clean slate* from God that depends on faith'?

When Paul declares: 'For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God' (2 Cor. 5:21), are we to limit this 'righteousness' to forgiveness? In other words: 'For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become [or have] *the clean slate* of God'?

---

<sup>3</sup> The original of 1 Cor. 9:21 does *not* state it! I agree with the translators, of course, who have translated it that way (see my *Believers*), but the point is, strictly speaking, it is not a textual phrase.

## *Observations on a Colloquy*

When Paul says that ‘the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law... the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe... his righteousness... so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus’ (Rom. 3:21-26), are we to understand this as forgiveness, the imputation of ‘a clean slate’ to the believer? That is: ‘*The clean slate* of God has been manifested apart from the law... *the clean slate* of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe... his *clean slate*... so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus’?

When the apostle asserts that ‘to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works’ (Rom. 4:4-6), was he referring merely to forgiveness, ‘a clean slate’? That is: ‘To the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as *a clean slate*, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts *a clean slate* apart from works’?<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> While in Rom. 3:21 – 5:21 Paul does not define righteousness so as to include obedience to the law, but does speak of forgiveness (Rom. 4:7-8), this does not mean that righteousness is only forgiveness. After all, Paul has already said – and only just said – that ‘it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified’ (Rom. 2:13). I am not saying that the believer is justified by his own obedience to the law, of course, but I am saying that the believer’s righteousness does involve that perfect obedience to the law which was wrought for him by Christ. When we read ‘righteousness’ in Rom. 3 and beyond, therefore, this must be borne in mind. Consider: ‘Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued *a law that would lead to righteousness* did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works... Being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about *the righteousness that is based on the law*, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based on faith

## *Observations on a Colloquy*

And when Paul links ‘obedience’ (works) and ‘righteousness’ – as he does: ‘For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous’ (Rom. 5:19) – surely he was thinking of more than forgiveness, ‘a clean slate’, was he not? Or are we to think in terms of this: ‘For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be given *a clean slate*’?

When Paul speaks of ‘the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left’ (2 Cor. 6:7; see also Eph. 6:10-17; 1 Thess. 5:8) for the servants of God, is he referring to the weapons of *a clean slate*?<sup>5</sup>

And turning to the old covenant, the Mosaic law – the law under which Christ lived and died – surely the reward for law-keeping was more than forgiveness, ‘a clean slate’, was it not? Does this not play into: ‘Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes’ (Rom. 10:4)? ‘Christ is the end of the law for *a clean slate* to everyone who believes’?

Let us apply the suggestion to Romans 4, Abraham and the believer. Are we to read Scripture like this:

---

says...’ (Rom. 9:30 – 10:6). It is the same point. Righteousness under the law and under the gospel both involve obedience to the law. The law promised life (Rom. 7:10) for perfect obedience. As Christ said: ‘Do this [the law], and you will live’ (Luke 10:28). Israel could say: ‘It will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us’ (Deut. 6:25). In the old covenant, the righteousness had to be the sinner’s own obedience – impossible. In the new covenant, the sinner’s righteousness is Christ’s obedience on his behalf. See below for Rom. 8 and Rom. 10.

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin: ‘By “righteousness” you must understand rectitude of conscience, and holiness of life’. John Gill: ‘By the armour of righteousness, on the right hand, and on the left: meaning, either the whole armour of God, with which a Christian is all over clothed from head to foot, and in the strength of Christ may engage any adversary without fear; or else particularly the sword of the Spirit in the right hand, and the shield of faith in the left, whereby both the offensive and defensive part may be acted; or, as others think, uprightness of conscience, and holiness of life and conversation’.

## *Observations on a Colloquy*

If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as *a clean slate*’. Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as *a clean slate*... He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of *the clean slate* that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that *a clean slate* would be counted to them as well... the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through *the clean slate* of faith... his faith was ‘counted to him as *a clean slate*’. But the words ‘it was counted to him’ were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our *clean slate* (Rom. 4)?

Really?

And how about Romans 8:1-4? Is this what Paul meant us to understand:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law – namely, *a clean slate* – might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:1-4)?

Really?

Brian rightly introduced Phinehas into the conversation. Here is the scriptural record:

Then they yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor, and ate sacrifices offered to the dead; they provoked the Lord to anger with their deeds, and a plague broke out among them. Then Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was stayed. And that was counted to him as righteousness from generation to generation forever (Ps. 106:28-31).

## *Observations on a Colloquy*

Clearly, Phinehas acted, he did something, he accomplished something by his works. And it was ‘counted to him as righteousness from generation to generation forever’. Are we to understand this in the sense of ‘*a clean slate* was counted to him from generation to generation forever’?

David, having spared Saul, declared:

The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness, for the Lord gave you into my hand today, and I would not put out my hand against the Lord’s anointed (1 Sam. 26:23).

The point is, David was speaking of his works. ‘His righteousness’ was not merely an absence of sin. He had been positively good in his actions. He had been ‘righteous’. And God rewarded him for his works. ‘Righteousness’ is more than ‘*a clean slate*’.

Of course, we must only apply the old covenant to ourselves in light of the new, yes.<sup>6</sup> And the New Testament shows us how to do it. Clearly, Christ and the apostles did not speak (or write) independently of the old covenant. Far from it. The principles of that covenant were right at the heart of what they were saying! Take for instance, Christ’s Sermon on the Mount, particularly Matthew 5. Note, also, the countless references to the law and the prophets in the apostolic writings. The principles set out in the old covenant and its law are fundamental to the New Testament. Consequently, although the old covenant and the Mosaic law are not always overtly referred to, in reading the New Testament we must never forget those principles. The old covenant was a covenant of shadows, yes, but those shadows – law, sabbath, temple (tabernacle), priesthood, sacrifice, altar, and all the rest – were all fulfilled in and by Christ, and their realities belong to every believer through his union with his Redeemer. Christ is the believer’s sabbath, priest, sacrifice and so on, and the believer is under the law of Christ. The letter to the Hebrews is replete with this teaching.

What I am saying is, the fact that the righteousness of the old covenant, the righteousness of the law, was a righteousness obtained by works, is essential to a proper understanding of

---

<sup>6</sup> Failure to do this leads to salvation by works. Precisely!

## *Observations on a Colloquy*

righteousness in the new covenant. In the old covenant, righteousness was obtained by works, by perfect obedience to the law. That is as plain as a pikestaff:

What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law... the law for righteousness... Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them (Rom. 9:30 – 10:5).

The children of Israel were told:

The Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day. And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us (Deut. 6:24-25; see also Deut. 24:13).

So much for the old covenant. Perfect obedience to the law brought righteousness, was righteousness. *The same goes for the new covenant.* With this difference, however: in the old covenant, the righteousness had to be obtained by the works of the individual for himself, whereas in the new covenant, the believer obtains his righteousness vicariously by the work of Christ on his behalf under the law. This is why Christ had to be born sinless under the law (Gal. 4:4). As a man under the law, he had to earn, to merit, deserve, the salvation of his people. The law had to be satisfied, upheld (Matt. 5:17-20; Rom. 3:31). And that is what Christ did. This is what the salvation wrought by the Lord Jesus Christ means. This is what is involved in those familiar passages such as Matthew 1:21; Luke 2:11; John 1:29; Acts 4:12; 5:31; 13:23,38-39; Colossians 1:20-23; 1 Timothy 1:15.

When Job declared: 'I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban' (Job 29:14), as the context makes clear, he was speaking in terms of his works. And he was talking of having more than 'a clean slate'!

And these two following passages must be seen in all their fullness in the new-covenant glory:



## Observations on a Colloquy

Let your priests be clothed with righteousness, and let your saints shout for joy (Ps. 132:9).

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels (Isa. 61:10).

They surely go much further than:

Let your priests be clothed with *a clean slate*, and let your saints shout for joy (Ps. 132:9).

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of *a clean slate*, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels (Isa. 61:10).

This concept of ‘clothing’ also carries over into the new covenant. See Matthew 22:11; Revelation 3:5; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9,13-14; 19:14.

Take for instance:

For all of you who were [spiritually]<sup>7</sup> baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ (Gal. 3:27, NASB; see also NIV).

And the concept of ‘being clothed with’ may rightly be extended to that of ‘putting on’ – as the ESV translates it:

For as many of you as were [spiritually] baptised into Christ have *put on* Christ (Gal. 3:27).

See also:

*Put on* the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 13:15).

*Put on* the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:24).

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have *put on* the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator... *Put on* then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved... (Col. 3:9-12).

---

<sup>7</sup> See my *Infant, Baptist, The Hinge*.

## *Observations on a Colloquy*

Other versions use ‘be clothed’ or the equivalent in place of ‘put on’ in those passages.

I am convinced, therefore, that the believer has more than ‘a clean slate’ imputed to him when he trusts Christ. He is clothed with Christ, he has put on Christ, he has put on the whole Christ. His righteousness in Christ, therefore, also includes perfect obedience to the law – not his own, of course, but his by union with Christ and his perfection.

### ***Was Christ’s perfect obedience only a necessary preparation for the cross?***

We know that Christ learned obedience by the things that he suffered – suffered throughout his life, and not just on the cross – and that this was an essential part of the lead-up to the cross:

It was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering (Heb. 2:10).

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:7-10).

Being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:8).

We all agree that Christ’s life leading up to the cross was a life of perfect obedience to the Father under the law (Gal. 4:4), and that this perfection of obedience was essential – to enable him to fulfil the old-covenant requirement and be a perfect, unblemished lamb, to be the Lamb of God (Ex. 12:5; 29:1; Leviticus *passim*; Numbers *passim*; John 1:29,36; 1 Pet. 1:19). The question is: Is that the end of it? Is that all that Christ’s perfection of obedience amounts to? Was Christ’s perfect obedience under the law a preparatory qualification – an essential qualification, it is true – to enable him to fulfil the old-covenant requirement and be a perfect offering, but, strictly speaking, it has no bearing on the believer?

In the same connection, what about Christ's statement to John the Baptist:

Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness (Matt. 3:15)?

Is there not a reference here to Psalm 40:7-8?<sup>8</sup> How often did Jesus speak of doing his Father's will, obeying his Father, pleasing his Father, and all in connection not only with his work on the cross, but – and especially so – with regard to his life on earth! See John 4:34; 5:36; 8:29; 17:4; 19:28,30. The question is: Is that the end of it? Is that all that Christ's perfection of obedience amounts to? Was it a preparatory qualification – an essential qualification it is true – to enable him to fulfil God's demands under the law, but, strictly speaking, nothing more?

***Was Christ's resurrection a vindication of the cross, and therefore a vindication of Christ's accomplishment of justification for his people, and nothing more?***

I refer to Geoff's view of Romans 4:25. Here is the verse:

[Christ] was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification (Rom. 4:25).

Paul used *dia* twice: 'delivered up for (*dia*) our trespasses and raised for (*dia*) our justification'. The same weight, surely, must be given in each case. In my view, it is far too weak to say that Christ was raised from the dead simply to vindicate his work, or give proof of the justification he had accomplished for his people on the cross, or to demonstrate that God was being fair to Christ in that since he had earned the pardon, so it was only right that he should be raised. The apostle used *dia*, 'for', 'on account of', in both parts of the sentence. Christ was delivered up *dia* our offences, and was raised *dia* our justification. The apostle clearly attributes the same weight and power to the resurrection as he does to the death of Christ as far as justification goes. Writing to believers, Paul could say that Christ died for our sins, on account of our sins, to deal with our sins, in order to deliver us from our offences, and likewise

---

<sup>8</sup> More of which later.

he was raised for our justification, on account of our justification, in order to justify us. This passage, I suggest, on its own, drives a coach and horses through the passive-obedience-only view. ‘Vindication’ for the second *dia* is woefully inadequate. The truth is, union with Christ is the key to this entire discussion, and union with Christ involves union with him in his death *and* resurrection (Rom. 6:4-8).

### ***Hebrews 10 is critical***

This is Geoff’s major point. He thinks that the writer’s statement in Hebrews 10 is clinching, especially when the context of his (the writer’s) immediate quote of Jeremiah 31 is factored in. For Geoff, this passage puts the issue beyond doubt: the cross brings perfection, and perfection is identical to cleansing, ‘the forgiveness of sins’ – ‘the clean slate’. This, of course, takes us back to my first point, which cannot be baulked. If Geoff is right, then justification is forgiveness, and forgiveness is justification; the believer’s perfection is a clean slate.

Let me quote the Hebrews passage:

By a single offering [Christ] has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying: ‘This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days’, declares the Lord, ‘I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds’, then he adds: ‘I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more’. Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin (Heb. 10:14-18).

Does this passage teach that ‘perfection’ and ‘forgiveness’ are one and the same? We know, as Geoff rightly argues, the cross accomplishes perfection for the elect (to be applied to them upon their believing), and this perfection certainly includes forgiveness. But does forgiveness exhaust the perfection? For instance, the believer’s new heart, his new mind is also included in Christ’s accomplishment, as the above extract shows.

Moreover, within the same context, the writer has just said:

And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb. 10:10).

## *Observations on a Colloquy*

So positional sanctification – that is what the writer is referring to in this verse – is also part of the perfection which Christ accomplished on the cross. And positional sanctification is more than ‘a clean slate’.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, I deliberately retained the opening ‘and’ in that extract: ‘And by that will...’. We need to go back, go back to the start of the chapter:

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshippers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said: ‘Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said: “Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book”’.

When he said above: ‘You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings’ (these are offered according to the law), then he added: ‘Behold, I have come to do your will’. He does away with the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering [Christ] has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying: ‘This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days’, declares the Lord, ‘I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds’, then he adds: ‘I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more’. Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin (Heb. 10:1-18).

---

<sup>9</sup> See my *Fivefold*.

## *Observations on a Colloquy*

Christ, at his incarnation, addressing his Father,<sup>10</sup> vows to fulfil the will of God, doing so by keeping the law<sup>11</sup> in the body prepared for him by the Father. This, Christ carried out to the full. In his body, from his incarnation (or, at least, his baptism)<sup>12</sup> to the cross and his final *tetelestai* (John 19:30),<sup>13</sup> Christ was always doing the will of God – both in his life and in his death. And in doing that will, in his body Christ wrought something. What? ‘And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all’; that is, by his obedience to, and fulfilment of, the will of God (including the law of God – see Psalm 40:8), Christ wrought the positional sanctification (Heb. 10:10)<sup>14</sup> to be applied to the elect upon their coming to faith.

In other words, while the one act of Christ’s obedience at the cross accomplished the believer’s perfection, Christ’s entire obedience – in life and death – is what constitutes that perfection and is what is actually imputed to the believer, not merely Christ’s work in his dying hours on the cross.<sup>15</sup>

I do not for a moment question that the work was accomplished on the cross:

As one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by

---

<sup>10</sup> Quoting Ps. 40:7-8.

<sup>11</sup> Do not miss the connection between ‘I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart’ (Ps. 40:8) and the promise of the new covenant that God’s law would be written on the heart of the believer. Of course, in the new covenant the law of God is the law of Christ, but the point is the law of God permeates both covenants. The law of God for Israel was the law of Moses; the law of God for the believer is the law of Christ. See my *Believers*.

<sup>12</sup> I am not entering that minefield, not having been supplied with a map!

<sup>13</sup> ‘It is accomplished’.

<sup>14</sup> Among other things – see, for instance, 1 Cor. 1:30.

<sup>15</sup> I have recently preached two sermons on this theme:

‘Christ’s Body Prepared: Why?’

([sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=4917917520](http://sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=4917917520))

‘Christ’s Obedience’

([sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=5717224112](http://sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=5717224112)).

## *Observations on a Colloquy*

the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous (Rom. 5:18-19).

Thus, the question is not: What work of Christ accomplished the believer's perfection? Rather, it is: What does that perfection comprise? I say the cross of Christ accomplishes the perfection, but that perfection includes Christ's active and passive obedience. It is not the body of Christ or the blood of Christ; it is both (John 6:48-58).

So my position is that though the work was done on the cross, the entire obedience of Christ as Mediator is imputed to the believer. As I have said, union with Christ is the key. This is more than representation, as Geoff would have it. Men are either in Adam or in Christ (1 Cor. 15:21-22, 45-49; see also Rom. 5:12-19). Men were not constituted sinners in Adam by mere representation. Neither are believers constituted righteous in Christ by mere representation.

What is more, contrary to Geoff's view of Romans 3:31, it is only this perfection by the entire work of the whole Christ – not simply 'a clean state' – that upholds the law, as Paul so confidently asserts that the gospel does (Rom. 3:31).

Finally, while it did not come up in the colloquy (although Geoff got near to it in referring to his covenant-theology background and seminary training), it is often claimed that the active obedience concept is a product of covenant theology. This is not so. It predates covenant theology (which was invented in the 16th century).<sup>16</sup> I do not quote the following to establish my position on this matter, but simply to show that the concept was not invented

---

<sup>16</sup> Although Johann Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575) was probably the first to publish a work containing the concept, Kaspar Olevianus (1536-1587) was the inventor of covenant theology in Germany, when he and Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583) drafted the final version of the Heidelberg Catechism (1562). William Ames (1576-1633) was the leading British exponent of covenant theology, which dominated the Westminster Confession of the Presbyterians (1643-1646) and the Savoy Declaration of the Independents (1661). Particular Baptists today, using the 1689 Confession, get as close as they can to covenant theology.

*Observations on a Colloquy*

in the 16th or 17th century by covenant theologians. What follows probably dates from the late 2nd century:

For what else could hide our sins but the righteousness of that one? How could we who were lawless and impious be made upright except by the Son of God alone? Oh the sweet exchange!... That the lawless deeds of many should be hidden by the one who was upright, and the righteousness of one should make upright the many who were lawless!<sup>17</sup>

Of course, I suppose it is possible to read it like this:

For what else could hide our sins but *the clean slate* of that one? How could we who were lawless and impious be made upright (that is, given *a clean slate*) except by the Son of God alone? Oh the sweet exchange!... That the lawless deeds of many should be hidden by the one who was upright (that is, had *a clean slate*), and *the clean slate* of one should make upright (that is, give *a clean slate* to) the many who were lawless!

But I do not think so!

---

<sup>17</sup> Quoted from the 'Epistle of Mathetes (that is, a disciple) to Diognetus'.