

Points to Ponder on Christ's Active Obedience

These are just headings, brief points. See my previous articles for detailed arguments.¹

1. Christ accomplished justification on the cross (Rom. 5:18; Heb. 10:10,14). This is not in dispute. Even so, we must not forget the part played by the resurrection (Rom. 4:25) – taking full account of the double *dia* – nor by Christ's subsequent life (Rom. 5:9-10).

2. The real issue is not the means of the believer's justification, but what precisely is imputed to the believer at the point of faith. The Bible calls this 'righteousness'. The new covenant draws very heavily on the old covenant. What was 'righteousness' in the old covenant? It was obedience to the law: '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; see also Deut. 24:13). Righteousness in the old covenant was far more than pardon. It was something positive, something actually done (see Ps. 106:30-31). This principle must not be jettisoned when we come to the new covenant. As Christ is the believer's sabbath, priest, temple, sacrifice, so he is his righteousness. Whatever such things were in shadow in the old covenant, in the new covenant they are the believer's actual experience in Christ.

3. Of course, no man is justified by the works of the law (Gal. 2:16), righteousness does not come by the law (Gal. 2:21), nor could the law impart life, and thus 'righteousness is not based on the law' (Gal. 3:21), but this does not in any way nullify point 2. The fact is, no sinner can keep the law; that is why there is no justification by the law. But, if someone did keep the law,

¹ 'Into the Lions' Den: Christ's Active Obedience Re-Visited'; 'Observations on a Colloquy'.

Points to Ponder on Christ's: Active Obedience

that would be a very different story (Rom. 7:10; 10:5). Christ was born and lived without sin (Acts 3:14; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 7:26-27; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5) under the law (Gal. 4:4) to fulfil it (Matt. 5:17), and he did what the law was too weak to accomplish, too weak because man is a sinner (Rom. 8:1-4).

And thus Christ, by his obedience to the law in both life and death, laid the basis for Paul's assertion:

Do we then overthrow the law by this faith [that is, by the gospel, especially justification by faith]? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law (Rom. 3:31; see Matt. 5:17; Rom. 8:4).

4. 'Righteousness' must be more than 'pardon'. Take this:

One will scarcely die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die – but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:7-8).

'Righteous', having 'righteousness', is equivalent to 'good', to being good, not merely 'pardon' or being 'pardoned'. The unconverted are not merely unpardoned sinners. Similarly, saints are not merely pardoned sinners.

As John said:

If you know that he [Christ] is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him (1 John 2:29; see John 7:18).

Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he [Christ] is righteous (1 John 3:7).

Christ is not 'pardoned', but he is 'righteous', and 'righteousness' is something done.

5. Those who think 'righteousness' means 'pardon' must read the following texts this way:

Unless your *pardon* exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:20).

Gentiles who did not pursue *pardon* have attained it, that is, a *pardon* that is by faith; but... Israel who pursued a law that would lead to *pardon* did not succeed in reaching that law.

Points to Ponder on Christ's: Active Obedience

Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works... Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the *pardon* of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's *pardon*. For Christ is the end of the law for *pardon* to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the *pardon* that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the *pardon* based on faith says... (Rom. 9:30 – 10:6)

For our sake he [God] made him [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the *pardon* of God (2 Cor. 5:20).

I cannot!

6. Union with Christ is the key. All that Christ, as Mediator, is and all that Christ has done, as Mediator, is the believer's by reason of union with Christ. This must not – cannot – be confined to Christ's work on the cross.

7. If the active obedience of Christ is not imputed to the believer, it means that his obedience to his Father under the law was simply a preparation for the cross, leaving only his work on the cross to be imputed. In which case, at what point precisely did the work of Christ that is imputed to the believer start?