

Introduction

All the work of Jesus Christ as our representative before God can be characterized as obedience. To treat the subject of his obedience, therefore, is to preach the gospel. The subject deals with our eternal salvation, with the eternal life that is ours as God's gift in Christ Jesus. The doctrine derives from God's Word, which is the record and interpretation of God's mighty and gracious works. With this study we are in the realm of historical events.

The author of Hebrews, citing Psalm 40:7, declares that the Messiah was foreseen in prophecy as the obedient Servant of the Lord: "Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God'" (Hebrews 10:7). The "evangelist" of the Old Testament, Isaiah, also speaks in the voice of the coming Messiah: The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back" (Isaiah 50:5).

The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 5:18,19: Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. Notice that Adam's trespass (fatal for us all) is equated with disobedience in verse 19. Notice how the one act of righteousness (resulting in justification) equates with "the obedience of the one man" (Christ) in verse 19.

It is only appropriate, then, that in our church's great confession of 1577 Jesus' righteousness is identified as and equated with his obedience: "The righteousness which is imputed to faith or to the believer out of pure grace is the obedience, suffering and resurrection of Christ, since he has made satisfaction for us to the law, and paid for our sins" Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration III. Righteousness of Faith before God (Trigl. 919, 14).

No explicit distinction between Christ's active obedience and his passive obedience is made in Scripture. Neither does the Bible use

25 the terms. They are theological "shorthand" for what the Scripture says about all of Jesus' saving work. We distinguish between what he did (active) and what he suffered (passive), between his living the perfect life of love (active) and suffering punishment for the sins of the world (passive). When we speak of the active obedience we must not overlook the fact that long before his crucifixion he suffered the pain of circumcision, hunger pangs, and fatigue. When we speak of the passive obedience we must not forget that in his Passion he acted voluntarily. He set his face toward Jerusalem, submitted to arrest, went the way of the cross.

The Formula of Concord does not make a formal distinction between active and passive obedience, but it includes both without the formal terminology. For example: "Christ covers all our sins...with his complete obedience (which [he] rendered the Father for us from his birth to his most ignominious death upon the cross)..." Thorough Declaration III. Righteousness of Faith before God: (Trigl. 923, 22). "From his birth to his most ignominious death" includes under his obedience all that he did and all that he suffered.

The God-Man Christ Jesus Submitted to God's Law and Kept It Perfectly for Us (Active Obedience).

What we were obliged to do and never could do, Jesus Christ the God-Man did in our place

We do not measure up to what God had in mind when he created man in his own image. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). At Romans 2:10, Paul had given assurance to the moral Jew and the Greek lover of wisdom alike of glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. The problem is that there is no one who does good by God's standards: All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. (Romans 3:12). Not only have we inherited a sinful nature from our first parents. We have also been active sinners, rebels, of no use to God, a positive danger to one another. The spiritually blind cannot respond to the Light, the spiritually deaf cannot listen to God's instruction or his good news, a spiritual corpse cannot take a step toward God, or make a decision to accept and follow Jesus. Human nature, when it comes to the things of the Spirit of God, is not only weak and sickly. It is dead.

All mankind fell in Adam's fall; one common sin infects us all. 26
From one to all the curse descends, and over all God's wrath
impends.

(Christian Worship 378, 1)

More than a man was needed to do what God required of human beings. The prophet Jeremiah gave the coming Messiah a name that belongs only to God. He writes, at 23:6, In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness. In his good time, God will send a man to do his saving work. That man will be more than a man. He will bear the name of the God of free and faithful grace, that special name of God that in English we spell with four capital letters, Lord. It also has four letters in Hebrew, and it is the name we translate as Yahweh, or Jehovah.

God was faithful to all his promises concerning the One whom he would send. When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons (Galatians 4:4, 5). In the days of the War in Vietnam a picket sign appeared at a union convention: "War is good business; invest your son." That was a sobering and even shuddery thought. It is what God did. He made it his business to conquer Satan and establish peace with a race that was at enmity with him. He invested his only Son in that war.

More than man was needed. Though Jesus the Messiah had willingly submitted to the law, he also declared that he was above the law: "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:8) He is the Lord of the Sabbath because he is the Lord who established the Sabbath. On the seventh day God rested. By his Word he made all things, seen and unseen. Jesus is that Word, made flesh, and there is none greater. He calls himself the Son of Man. That does not mean he is the "ideal man," or the "flower of humanity." It means he is God, come in the flesh to destroy the works of the devil. It means he came to win "the endless Sabbaths of the blest" for us through his perfect obedience.

When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman (Galatians 4:4). "The Lord Our Righteousness" came as a baby, fully human. We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin (Hebrews 4:15). Truly God and truly man, the divine and human are united in one Person.

We Christians should know that if God is not in the scale to give it weight, we, on our side, sink to the ground.
I mean it this way: if it cannot be said that God died for us, but only a man, we are lost; but if God's death and a dead God lie in the balance, his side goes down and ours goes up like a light and empty scale.... But he could not sit on the scale unless he had become a man like us, so that it could be called God's dying, God's martyrdom, God's blood, and God's death. For God in his own nature cannot die; but now that God and man are united in one person, it is called God's death when the man dies....
-- Martin Luther in LW 41:103 f. (On the Councils and the Church)

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons (Galatians 4:4, 5). Law here does not refer only to the Mosaic complex, the cradle to the grave system of laws that God gave Israel. It refers to God's holy and unchanging will, everything that God demands of all people. He was acting for all people, not only his own Jewish people. He accepted the requirement to live as a human being in perfect love for God and unselfish love for the neighbor. He did so simply by becoming a human being. As a creature he was subject to the First Commandment. As Mary's son, he was subject to her and Joseph under the Fourth Commandment.

Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens (Hebrews 7:26). Not only according to his divine nature, but also according to his human nature, he was holy, not polluted by sin. He was blameless, every kind of evil foreign to him. He was undefiled, not stained by any sin. He is set apart from sinners, not aloof from our human struggles, but not partaking of our sinful nature. That he has measured up to the law's requirements is clear from the fact that God has exalted him.

Christ's victory over the old evil Foe did not come without a struggle. We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin (Hebrews 4:15). Not only did our Savior withstand the day-to-day assaults of the Tempter. At the beginning of his public ministry he was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty

nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you 28
are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus
answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on
every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:1-4).

Materialism has been a temptation to believers in every age. Whether a person is full or hungry, he will be tempted to that form of unbelief that in a variety of ways believes man does live on bread alone. Even baptized children of God know the temptation to "take the cash and let the credit go." In the Garden of Eden, where there was plenty to eat, the devil overcame the first Adam. He did it by questioning God's goodness. In the desert, addressing a man who has been fasting for more than a month, he tries to get Jesus to doubt his Father's grace and providence. Also, to prove his own deity by a miracle. Basically, to do the Tempter's bidding.

In our place and on our behalf Jesus obeyed his Father's will refusing to do the devil's bidding. In perfect obedience he feared, loved, and trusted God above all things. In our stead and on our behalf Jesus said: "It is written...." The weapon of his warfare was, as ours must always be, the reliable written Word of God.

As he has proved for thousands of years, and especially in the last two thousand, Satan is not a quitter. Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" (Matthew 4:5-7).

Like the temptation in Paradise, like the first temptation of Jesus, and like all temptations, this one was at bottom a temptation to unbelief. Challenge God to see whether he will really do what he has promised. Test whether he means what he says. Also, it was a temptation to self-aggrandizement. Prove your identity and your authority by doing the spectacular. Forget God's painful plan and take the easy way to glory.

Again, the reliable Word of God was Jesus' weapon of choice: "It is written...." Again, he kept the law in our stead and to remedy our lack of righteousness.

The Adversary came back and offered easy terms on a grand bargain. Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed

29 him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only'" (Matthew 4:8-10). As usual, he was promising what he could not possibly deliver. Why shouldn't he try? It had worked with the first Adam, and with millions after him—and usually with promises less grand. Here is the offer of kingship without the cross. Instead of the long, agonizing road, one little gesture. Instead of enduring an ignominious shameful death, bow down and worship God's archenemy, the first revolutionary. Instead of the bitter cup, only a single obeisance.

Here as always, Jesus put God first—his name, his will, and his kingdom first. Here again, Scripture is the weapon of Jesus' warfare. He knew it, meditated on it, relied on it, lived it. Finally, he overcame with it. His victory is ours.

The outcome was never in doubt, since Jesus is truly God and could not sin. Yet, the battle was real, not a charade. The inner turmoil and the appeal of "another way" were a real test. The athlete who faces a lesser adversary and is bound to win still needs to make a real effort. Jesus was up against a wily opponent of long experience and many successes.

In his ministry our Lord not only avoided the negatives, the things prohibited by God's law. He also lived the positive, motivated by and always demonstrating the love that is the sum and substance of the law. As a human being he was required by God's unchanging will to honor, serve, and obey his parents: Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them (Luke 2:51). As a Jewish baby boy he was circumcised at the age of one week (Matthew 1:21). As a Jewish youth he was observant of the feast days and made the most of the opportunity to learn: They found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers (Luke 2:46, 47). As a subject of the Roman Empire he honored and obeyed the government and paid taxes: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" (Matthew 22:21). He gladly heard and learned God's Word: He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom (Luke 4:16). He prayed: (Luke 6:12). He gave thanks (John 6:11).

He made sure his mother would be taken care of after he was gone. Even when he was giving up his life to pay for the sins

of the world, he was not too busy to provide for her. To the end, 30
he was perfectly fulfilling God's law in our stead (John 19:26, 27).

Active and positive in his love, he helped and befriended those in need: News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them (Matthew 4:24)

Under hideous torture, Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Human beings at their worst had subjected him to cruel treatment. He made intercession for the sinners who were torturing him, for ignorant unbelievers. He might have prayed for justice. Instead, he prayed that his Father would give these murderers time and grace and knowledge to repent of what they had done in ignorance, and to receive the pardon of a forgiving God. A schoolboy was asked, "When was Jesus at his greatest?" His answer: "When he prayed for his enemies, for I could not have done that." He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly (1 Peter 2:22, 23). With more provocation than any mere human being could bear, he responded in a loving way that did not divert him from his assignment or make him mistrust the One who had assigned him.

Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners (Hebrews 7:26). No one could point a finger of blame at him. Even in his thoughts he was perfectly pure. Even though he took the place of us sinners, he never joined in our sinful actions.

In him is no sin (1 John 3:5).

Christ came and has God's anger stilled, our human nature sharing.
He has for us the law obeyed
And thus the Father's vengeance stayed which over us impended.
(Christian Worship 390, 4)

That is to say...

... Jesus' Active Obedience Was for Our Salvation

In Romans 5, Paul compares the "two Adams" and the results of their activity. What the first Adam and the Second Adam did affect

31 all human beings. They are not merely representative types. Adam's act is charged against the whole human race. Christ's act is credited to the whole human race. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous (Romans 5:18, 19).

The "one trespass" was Adam's, eating the forbidden fruit. The offense of Adam consisted in breaking the law. Adam grasped at equality with God, ate the forbidden fruit, and thus brought guilt and death upon himself and all his descendants.

The righteousness of Christ consisted in his perfect obedience to the law. He was acting in our stead, obeying as our substitute, and so God has credited that righteousness to us. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:6-8). Through that humble obedience "the many will be made righteous." "Many" does not mean some. It means all. The same "many" who were made sinners in Adam's sin are declared righteous in Christ's obedience.

The 1577 confession of our church interprets and applies Romans 5:18, 19 in this way: "Our righteousness before God is that God forgives us our sins out of pure grace, without any work, merit, or worthiness of ours preceding, present, or following, that he presents and imputes to us the righteousness of Christ's obedience on account of which righteousness we are received into grace by God, and regarded as righteous." (Formula of Concord. Epitome III. Righteousness of Faith before God, Trigl. 793).

"O the sweet exchange, O the inscrutable creation,
O the unlooked-for benefits, that the sin of many should be put out of sight in one Righteous Man, and the righteousness of one should justify many sinners!"

(Epistle to Diognetus ix.5 [mid-2nd century]).

The God-Man Christ Jesus Willingly Suffered the Punishment for Our Sin

No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him—the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough (Psalm 49:7, 8). What we were obliged to do and we could not do, Jesus Christ the God-Man did. He bore the punishment for our sin. Our Redeemer took upon himself the punishment for our failures to love God and our neighbor. Christ, who willingly accepted the obligation to keep the law in our stead, also accepted the obligation to bear the punishment that the law demanded.

Quoting from the Old Testament Scriptures, quoting psalmists and prophets, Paul characterizes the human race, “all.” He begins and ends with First Commandment sins, and mentions sins of the tongue and of hatred in between:

“All have turned away; they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”

“Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.”

“The poison of vipers is on their lips.”

“Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.”

“Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know.”

“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God (Romans 3:12-19).

Wrote Dr. Martin Luther in 1536-37, in Smalcald Articles: “All in us is nothing but sin.... For there is nothing left with which we can think of any good thing to pay for sin, but there is only a sure despairing concerning all that we are, think, speak, or do” (Part III, Art. II, Trigl. 489):

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6). There was a way that God had chosen for his foremost creatures. It was the way of life. It was a way of peace and joy in following his will and living in harmony with him. But we always knew better, thought that somehow God was trying to hold out on us, to keep us from really living. We have gone our own way. As Augustine said, we were one great *massa perdit*, “damned mass.” Ignorant and helpless, like a flock of foolish sheep, unaware that we had gone astray and straying blindly toward our damnation. We followed our urges, impulses, and desires, giving no thought to the dangers

We have gone astray. Like sheep, not very bright. Following blind impulse, false leaders, our own selfish will. Looking for greener pastures, looking for grass on the wrong side of the fence, wandering away, always farther from the real source of life. Finally getting lost in the desert, where there is no food and water, no shade or safety. In trying to find our way back to God, in trying to know him again and be like him, we have been confused and ignorant. We have been incapable of knowing or choosing him—or even wanting to.

Everyone devises his own path to God and no one finds God's path to life. Like sheep. Not smart. This was a universal condition, including the whole human race. Criminals and solid citizens, thieves and statesmen, tax collectors and Pharisees, selfish swingers and humanitarians. All lost sheep. And where will that lead? It will lead to a miserable eternity of regret, of rage, of doing the same hateful and stupid things over and over again, forever and ever. When a human being keeps saying to God, “Let me alone; let me go my own way,” there finally comes a time when God lets a person go his own way. It is the way to hell.

“Some...are slaves to riches, honors, pleasures, and the powers of this world. But others ...are zealous for their own righteousness, virtue, and wisdom, having deserted the righteousness and obedience of God in their spiritual pride” (LW 25:226 – Lectures on Romans).

God did not just let us go to hell. He did not leave us in our spiritual slavery. Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death (Hebrews 2:14, 15). Flesh and blood is subject to death. Death was there waiting for us when we were born. It did not get us then, but it is waiting for another time, even if it has to wait a hundred years.

In taking on our humanity and obeying to the full, the Son of God subjected himself to death. He did that for a special and glorious purpose. He has rendered the devil, “who holds the power of death,” ineffective. Jesus, who shared in our humanity, has neutralized the devil's ultimate weapon. He did this by satisfying God's justice and paying the ransom price for our deliverance. The devil still exists and people still die, but death has lost its power to terrify

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree (Galatians 3:13). Lecturing on this passage, Luther said: "The law did everything to him that it did to us. It accused us and terrified us. It subjected us to sin, death, and the wrath of God; and it condemned us with its judgment. And it had a right to do all this, for we have all sinned. But Christ 'committed no sin, and no guile was found on his lips.' ... Therefore he owed nothing to the law. And yet against him—so holy, righteous, and blessed—the law raged as much as it does against us accursed and condemned sinners, and even more fiercely. It accused him of blasphemy and sedition; it found him guilty in the sight of God of all the sins of the entire world; finally it so saddened and frightened him that he sweat blood; ... and eventually it sentenced him to death, even death on a cross." -- LW 26:370 (Lectures on Galatians, 1535)

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth (Isaiah 53:6, 7). Sin has to be somewhere. It can't be swept away or removed with snap of a finger. It can't be ignored or removed with a cheap miracle. It has to be somewhere, on someone. "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Old Testament Israel was commanded to celebrate, once each year, the Great Day of Atonement. A Lamb was chosen, a yearling, without any spot or blemish, any scar or flaw. The lamb was observed for fourteen days, to make sure it met the requirements. Then, on the great day, the high priest of Israel placed his hand on the animal, symbolically transferring the sins of Israel to that spotless lamb. The lamb's throat was cut, and it was offered as a burnt sacrifice.

That lamb, all those lambs through all the years, were a type or foreshadowing of Christ. They pictured what God would finally do for the sins of the world. Christ Jesus, who was without sin became the bearer of the whole world's sin. There were two possible places for my sin to reside and for the punishment of your sin to fall, on me or on him. "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

"All" does not leave anyone out.

35 "In this text all the apostles have attacked the religions and the Law itself. All we have gone astray. The religions through their own rules and their own way want to load our sins on us and say, 'If you will observe these things, you will be free from your sins.' On Him, not on us, contrary to every law and order, where whoever sins is punished." -- LW 17:225 f. (Lectures on Isaiah, Chapters 40-66)

Our Lord's suffering and death was not a mere human tragedy, not an accident of fate, not simply a prime example of man's inhumanity to man. It was "God's Great Exchange." God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). Our sin on him who had not experienced sin. His perfect obedience credited to us. For that the Son of God was treated like the greatest sinner, accursed, and God-forsaken. Where we should have been, under the load of sin, bearing its guilt and punishment, he was. He traded places with us. There was no reason he should die. He had no sin, knew no sin, committed no sin. He was not inclined to sin, had not experienced it, and was untouched by it. God made him to be sin for us. God treated him like sin personified. God punished our sins in him.

Recall all the wrongs you have suffered, all the hurtful things that were ever done to you. All of it together cannot begin to compare to the wrong you and I have done to the just and loving God. He charged it all to his Son. "...The deepest stroke that pierced him was the stroke that Justice gave" (Christian Worship 127, 2). Jesus was not a sinner, but he was treated as the sinner. When he cried out because God would not look at him, because God had turned his back on him, he was where we should have been. He was there so that you and will never have to be there and know what that is like. To be where God is not, where there is no sense of his loving presence, to be God-forsaken and know that God is justly angry with me—that is hell.

He was the one who loved his Father perfectly and lived the perfect life of love and God has credited that to us, "that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Where Christ is, there is his righteousness, and through faith we are in him. Where righteousness is, there is forgiveness and life and salvation, and they are ours are in him.

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or

gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed 36
down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of
Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect (1 Peter 1:18, 19). God did
not do something cheap when he rescued us. He did not use things
that can be stolen, that nobody can keep forever. He did not redeem
us with something undependable, like money, which gets lost or de-
valued. "Not with perishable things such as silver or gold...but with
the precious blood of Christ." That was a tremendous price. The
blood of Christ, the Lamb of God. That was the price of our redemp-
tion.

In many a modern pulpit, we hear of God's fatherly heart.
We are assured that we do not have to be afraid of God. We are
urged to stop being angry with him and to be at peace with one
another. None of this has any foundation or substance apart from
the blood of the Lamb of God. The next day John saw Jesus coming
toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the
sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

In the Old Testament, in the religion of John and Jesus, lambs died.
When Abraham was taking Isaac to the mountain of sacrifice, the
boy asked where the lamb was. When Moses led Israel out of Egyptian
slavery, a lamb was killed for every Jewish household. The
blood of the lamb was smeared on the door posts of every Jewish
house. When the angel of death moved through the land of Egypt,
slaying the firstborn of every house and palace in Egypt, the first-
born of Israel. Once a year, on the Great Day of Atonement, when
the high priest of Israel made sacrifice, first for his own sins and
then for the sins of the people, it was the lamb that died instead of
the people of Israel. Lambs were for dying, for sacrifice, for taking
the place of sinners. John the Baptizer said of Jesus: "Look, the
Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

The whole world must include you and me. I can say, "Christ died
for me." You can say it, too, because it was for all.

That is the ground of our faith. That is the gospel. This Lamb was
sacrificed and our sins are atoned for. That is the plain language of
the Bible. It does not need more explanation and it must not be ex-
plained away.

"If we allow sin to remain in our conscience and try to deal with it
there, or if we look at sin in our heart,
it will be much too strong for us and will live on forever. But if we
behold it resting on Christ and [see it]

37 overcome by his resurrection, and then boldly believe this, even
it is dead and nullified. Sin cannot
remain on Christ, since it is swallowed up by his resurrection. Now
you see no wounds, no pain in him,
and no sign of sin. Thus St. Paul declares that 'Christ died for our
sin and rose for our justification' [Rom. 4:25]." -- LW 42:12 f. (A
Meditation on Christ's Passion)

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse
for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree"
(Galatians 3:13). How could the sinless Son of God be subjected to
God's curse? Paul solves the difficulty for us with one expression:
"for us." "Redeemed" means he paid the price to set us free. He
settled our account with the law by taking our place. Our sins be-
came the sins of Christ as though he himself had committed them,
and God treated him as sin personified: God made him who had no
sin to be sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Jesus the crucified was more than a victim of man's inhumanity to
man. He was the victim of God's justice. Someone has said with a
sneer, "Depending on your view of Jesus of Nazareth, God is either
a sadist or a masochist. He loves to torture or he loves to be tor-
tured. If Jesus is only a man, then God is a sadist for letting an
innocent man suffer that way. If Jesus is God, then God is a
masochist for letting himself be tortured that way." That bit of bril-
liance does not take into account that when a crime is pardoned,
someone must still take the consequences. When a debt is can-
celed someone must still absorb the loss. A hurt that is forgiven is
still a hurt. That is reality. That is justice. That was the way of the
cross and it was the only way for the simple reason that that is the
way God did it.

That scoffing brilliance also does not take into account that the in-
nocent only Son of God endured the consequences and paid the
debt and suffered the hurt willingly: The Sovereign Lord has
opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn
back (Isaiah 50:5). He feared the baptism with which he was to be
baptized. He trembled and agonized, and sweat blood. But he
willed the Father's will; he willed to do what was necessary to re-
deem the world; he did it. This means that he was not merely pas-
sive in his Passion. In his voluntary suffering he was still actively
obeying the law: loving God and loving man.

Seek whom you may to be your stay; none can redeem his brother
All helpers failed; this man prevailed, the God-Man and none other.

The Servant-Lord our life restored.

We're justified, for he has died, the guiltless for the guilty.

(Christian Worship 395:2)

The Benefits of Christ's Obedience Are Ours through Faith Alone in Christ Alone

Since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe (1 Corinthians 1:21). The philosophy of the Greeks, the gods of the barbarians, the legalism of the Roman world did not help anyone to find God or his salvation. Paul says that in his wisdom God did not want the world to know him by its own wisdom. What would happen to people who weren't smart enough to find him that way? Besides, why should God do anything for people who can do it themselves? Why should Christ pay such a price for the self-sufficient?

"God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe." It is not by close argumentation or accurate syllogisms, but by preaching the fact of Christ's perfect obedience in our stead and in our behalf. Those who believe that objective truth have the righteousness of Christ, the salvation he came to earn for us.

The world still calls it foolishness. It has never been possible for man by his thinking or willing to believe. Church membership has been respectable in some times and some places. Some standard of morality seems like a good idea to almost everyone. Jesus the Teacher is generally respected. Paul, however, knew very well what human reason thinks of the message that a Jewish carpenter was the Son of God, that he died like a criminal only to have God raise him from the dead, and that this Jesus is the world's only hope of salvation. It is still true, however, as it was in the first century: Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ Romans 10:17).

"God... has his divine eternal law and his wonderful plan concerning our redemption... publicly preached; and by this collects an eternal church for himself from the human race, and works in the hearts of men true repentance and knowledge of sins, and true faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ."

-- Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration. II. Of Free Will, Trigl.

It has been said that quoting the familiar John 3:16 to a knowledgeable congregation is tantamount to inviting the hearers to think about other things. If, however, you can get them to wonder where your emphasis is going to be they might listen: For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. Believing is trust, reliance, banking all on the object of one's faith. Believing in God's one and only Son does not mean loving my neighbor as myself. I have not lived up to that. Believing is not experiencing the Inner Light, feeling something like an electrical shock, making a decision for Christ. It is simply believing that Jesus Christ was obedient in life and death for every human being and that God raised him from the dead as the beginning of a great crop of people who will be raised to everlasting life.

Paul wrote to the believers at Rome: We maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law (Romans 3:28). He also demonstrated that salvation, justification, has always been through faith. Citing Genesis 15:3, he asks, What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness (Romans 4:3-5). Not on the basis of his own obedience was Abraham righteous in God's sight. No, Genesis 15:6 says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." He was not righteous in himself, this "Father of all believers." Nor was his faith some virtue or meritorious act that God recognized as righteous. A gracious God simply credited faith to him as righteousness.

What Paul does not say in these verses, but what is implicit in his argument is that Abraham's faith rested on God's promise, in the Descendant who was the object of God's promise. It was Christ's righteousness (obedience) that was credited to Abraham. From that Paul generalizes regarding "the man [any person] who does not work but trusts God." Like Abraham, "his faith is credited as righteousness."

Paul wrote to the believers at Ephesus: It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8, 9). God's grace is not something he gives us in order to enable us to

become righteous. God's grace is his regarding us with unconditional love and unmerited mercy. Grace is not a subtle concept for philosophers and theologians. It is what God demonstrated when he worked out the salvation of all sinners. It is not a private thought in the Lord's mind. It is there to see in what he did to redeem the human race.

By God's grace and through faith we have been saved. Like grace, faith is the gift of God. Faith is not a self-conscious deliberate decision to accept God's salvation. . Just as we did not decide to accept physical life from our parents, but simply received it as a gift, so faith is a gift and not the result of a decision on our part.

Strictly speaking, it is not faith that saves us, but the Savior. It is not faith that justifies us, but God. Faith only trusts that he has done it. Without the cross, without the empty tomb, without the Savior's obedient living and dying for us, faith would be without any foundation. The drowning person does not concentrate on his hand or the strength of his grip. He focuses on the life ring. So faith does not examine itself, measure itself, rely on itself. It focuses on Christ, who is strong to save. Do not ask, "Do I have faith?" Rather, ask, "Do I have a Savior?" The answer to the first question is always "yes" when I know that the answer to the second question is "yes."

Even if my faith is feeble, I still have the selfsame treasure and the selfsame Christ that others have.

There is no difference. Faith in him makes us all perfect, but works do not.

-- LW 23:28 (Sermons on the Gospel of St. John)

God gave me faith and forgiveness in Baptism. He nourishes and strengthens my faith with the assurance of forgiveness in his Supper. He assures me daily in his Word.

We Thank Our Savior for His Obedience with a Life of Joyful Obedience

We did not elect him who is King of kings and Lord of lords and he is not subject to recall or impeachment. He will continue in office whether we acknowledge him or not. We were redeemed to live under his rule. Every sin is an act of disloyalty; every denial is an act of treason. Every time the Lord turns us again, calls us back, and forgives us, he calls us to renewed faithfulness: "But be sure to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you" (1 Samuel 12:24). As we remember Christ's obedience for us, we will "serve him faithfully with all

41 [our] heart."

He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again (2 Corinthians 5:15). It is at this point that David Valleskey writes in his People's Bible – 2 Corinthians: "Christians today who weary of service in the kingdom, who sense a decline in the fervency of their love for Christ, would do well to come back again and again to the fountain, to the source of a Christian's love and service. We need to return to Calvary and view again the love Christ demonstrated for us where one died and therefore all died. And then, with Christ, we rise to newness of life, living a 'borrowed life,' his life, to his glory."

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). Our Lord Jesus Christ was rich. That is a very understated way of saying that he was the Lord from eternity. The holy and all-powerful God came to become a part of our human race. He did not stop being what he has been from eternity, but he became what he had not been: one of us. He became poor when he did that. He was laid in a borrowed manger, preached from a borrowed boat, entered his city on a borrowed donkey, was buried in a borrowed tomb. He made himself of no reputation, too on a servant's form, humbled himself, and died the death of the cross.

Because he did that we are rich. We have in our possession the most wonderful and most necessary thing there is: salvation. For his sake God regards you and me as forgiven, saints, his children, heirs of eternal life. His grace was stronger and more abundant than our sin. His gospel declares this, and even while the gospel is declaring this truth it is the power to convince us of it. When we trust this truth we already have what it promises, salvation (Romans 1:16; 10:17).

God's grace in Christ is not cheap, for he paid a terrible price. It is, however, free. It is a fact that the Lord has added many riches to this great gift. He has given most of us abundant material blessings. He also gives us grace to share those riches.

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires (Galatians 5:24). Notice the indicative. Paul does not say "should crucify" or "must crucify," but "have crucified." Paul gives us more encouragement and motivation in stating what is the case and what has occurred than in telling us

what ought to occur. Luther, too, used the indicative in discussing 42
the same subject: "The saints are certainly not without the flesh,
but they repress their carnal impulses, lest they break out in action"
(LW 6:97, Lectures on Genesis).

In the Christian's life of faith there is no thought of fixing up the old
sinful nature, giving up a few bad habits and cultivating a few
virtues. Get rid of it, Paul says: You were taught, with regard to your
former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted
by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds;
and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteous-
ness and holiness (Ephesians 4:22-24). "Put on the new self." This
new self is a creation of God. It is the restored image of God. It is
the renewal of what was lost when man fell into sin. It is true right-
eousness and holiness. As God created them, our first parents
were capable of knowing and willing and doing what God wanted.
From the moment of their first disobedience, however, from the day
of the Fall, they lost God's image. You and I were born in their im-
age, not God's. When Paul speaks of the old self, he is speaking of
the sinful ego that we inherited from Adam. He is speaking of all the
thoughts, motives, emotions, impulses, and desires in us that op-
pose God. When God speaks the word of forgiveness, based on
Christ's perfect life and innocent death and assured by his glorious
resurrection, he creates a new self. He says to us: "Put off the old;
put on the new."

Paul gives an example of putting off the old self and putting
on the new. Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully
to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body (Ephesians
4:25). Put off lying. Put on the truth. We are no longer subject to the
Father of Lies. God is a God of truth. We are created anew to be
truthful. A Christian who lies not only injures the person to whom he
lies, whether that is a fellow Christian or not. He also injures the
circle of his fellow Christians. He gives them a bad name and sets
them a bad example. The new self is responsive to God and respon-
sible for the body of believers. He, she, will not want to enter a rela-
tionship or an occupation that requires lying or dishonesty.

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a
life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a
fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But among you there must
not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or
of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor
should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are
out of place, but rather thanksgiving (Ephesians 5:1-4). In speech,

43 posture, and attitudes children imitate their parents. So are
God's children to imitate him. The apostle urges us: "Live a life
of love."

Imitating God means abhorring what he abhors: "Among you there
must not be even a hint of sexual immorality." It should be so far
removed from us that no idea that it is present among us should
occur to anyone. Furthermore, the gift of speech is for praising our
Creator and Redeemer, not for dirt or smut or double entendres.
"Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which
are out of place, but rather thanksgiving."

In Colossians 3:12, 13, Paul addresses God's chosen people, holy,
dearly loved. "Clothe yourselves," he says, and names a five-piece
outfit. That is, he mentions five virtues. They do not constitute an
exhaustive list, but we will not be likely to wear out these five by
overuse. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly
loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gen-
tleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever
grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord
forgave you. Maybe the five virtues aren't always so apparent in
your fellow believers, especially those you know best. "Bear with
each other." Let forgiveness be your continuing and characteristic
attitude. Not when forgiveness is asked for or when apologies are
offered, but before—as God did. Not if your neighbor meets you
halfway, but being ready to go all the way—as God did. Not bring-
ing up the past, but forgetting it—as God did.

Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to
please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you
in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.... For God did not call
us to be impure, but to live a holy life (1 Thessalonians 4:1, 7). The
Christian lifestyle is a developing thing. We are justified through in
Christ our Redeemer. Justification is complete and perfect, and
there is nothing to improve or develop there. Our sanctification, the
holy living to which God has called us and for which he has made
us new, is still imperfect and will be until the Lord takes us to him-
self. His apostle calls on us to live more and more according to what
pleases God.

The Christian lifestyle is a practical thing. That means learning and
living God's standards and not those of the unbelievers. "God did
not call us to be impure."

Peter also says "Finally" (1 Peter 3:8), Finally, all of you, live in
harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be

compassionate and humble. One Sunday per month, I think, our 44 pastor says, "Brothers and sisters, go in peace. Live in harmony with one another." What does it mean to live in harmony with one another? "Be sympathetic," says Peter. Feel for your fellow Christians in good times and bad. When your fellow believer has reason to be sad be sad with him. When he or she has reason to be happy rejoice along with them. Resist the temptation to be jealous. "Love as brothers." Remember that we are all members of the same family, because we all have the same Father and because his Son became our Brother. "Be compassionate." Let your heart go out to those who are in need, and act accordingly, in their best interest. "Be humble." Let someone else have the credit for what is done in the congregation. Be willing to let someone else have the place of honor. In church or family or community, be willing to take the role of servant, remembering why our Lord Jesus did not come and why he did come.

Peter continues in verse 9: Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. It may be easy enough to keep from using our fists or reaching for a weapon, but sometimes it is difficult to keep our mouths shut. Peter writes, "Do not repay insult with insult." How hard it is sometimes to keep from heaping verbal abuse on someone who has wronged us, to snap back, to trump someone's ace with a cruel remark. Repay evil and insult with blessing, says Peter. It is what our Lord taught in the Sermon on the Mount.

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. We are in the position of heirs who have not yet come into the full use of our inheritance. God has not publicly displayed the glory that belongs to his children. "What we will be has not yet been made known" (1 John 3:2). Our life in Christ is like a diamond still uncut. "But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." God does not plan to spend eternity by himself. Because of Jesus' perfect obedience in our stead, when he comes we will not be disappointed in what we can glimpse only vaguely now.

Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure (1 John 3:3). John uses the indicative, states a fact. Since we live in the hope of being like him, of seeing him as he is, we will be pursuing purity of living. A Christian life that is not charted and motivated by the sure hope of eternal life is inconceivable. Conversely, it is inconceivable that those who live in this hope should live any-

45 thing but a life of joyful obedience.

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