

—The Atonement of Christ, Lesson 3—

Chapter 4—The Active and Passive Obedience of Christ

- I. **Intro:** the sufferings and death of Christ, being of the nature of a penalty, could relieve His people from the liability under which they labored, but it could not provide them with a positive reward. Its effect would be to bring them back to zero, back to the position in which Adam stood: without sin, but also without righteousness. But it's not sinless people that go to heaven, but righteous people. Rescue from hell does not equal establishment in heaven. Hence, Christ not only paid the penalty due to our sin, but also rendered perfect obedience to the moral law by living a sinless life.
- II. **The Sinless Life of Christ**—that Christ lived a life of perfect love and unselfish service to God and man is clearly set forth in Scripture:
 - A. 1Pet 2.22
 - B. Heb 7.26
 - C. Jn 8.29
 - D. Jn 8.46
 - E. Lk 4.34
 - F. Christ prayed “Father, forgive them” but He never prayed, “Father forgive me.” Nor did He ever offer a sacrifice for Himself in the Temple.
 - G. By His life of spotless perfection He acquired for His people a positive righteousness which is imputed to them and which secures for them life in heaven. By His “passive obedience” we have been rescued from hell and by his “active obedience” we are given entrance into heaven.
- III. **Salvation by Grace**
 - A. Paul clearly teaches that we are saved, not by a self-acquired righteousness, but by an imputed righteousness, Rom 10.3; Phil 3.9; 2Cor 5.21; Gal 3.21; 2.21.
 1. How profoundly grateful we should be that not only our suffering for sin, but also our probation for heaven, has been assumed for us by Christ, that each of these is a thing of the past, and that we are safe forever in God's care.
 - B. The salvation which the Scriptures offer to mankind is therefore a salvation provided entirely by God Himself. It is not adulterated in any way by human works, which is nothing better in God's sight than a polluted rag, Isa 64.6; Tit 3.5.
 1. Even the faith through which salvation is received is a gift of God, Phil 1.29; Acts 16.14.
 2. We are therefore nothing more than the recipients of free grace.
 3. Good works are in no way the meritorious ground of our salvation, but the fruits and proof of it. They are performed as an expression of our love and gratitude for a salvation freely given.
 4. Our part is therefore one of praise and love to God.
 - C. This doctrine of the sufficiency of Christ's work regarding both His active and passive obedience is beautifully set forth in the WCF 8.5.
 - D. While it helps us to better understand more clearly and fully the work of Christ to divide it between an active and a passive part—as this clearly meets our need before God—we must not imagine that these two phases can be separated.
 1. We cannot even say that His active obedience was accomplished by his life and His passive obedience by His death. For in varying degrees, these two aspects of obedience were accomplished simultaneously and concurrently.
 2. Throughout His entire life as He actively obeyed He passively endured, and as He passively endured He actively obeyed. These two aspects of His work, while distinct in nature, were inextricably intertwined in time. Together they secure the wonderful, full salvation which was wrought out vicariously for us.

IV. The Crucifixion at Calvary

- A. Human ingenuity never devised greater agony than crucifixion. But as horrible as His physical suffering was, it only makes up a small part of what He underwent for our salvation.
- B. His spiritual suffering was far more intense and baffling than the physical. During those hours of suffering on the cross as our sin-offering, the unique relationship that had existed between His human soul and the Father was completely withdrawn. No glimpse of Divinity any longer broke in upon Him. God hid His face from Him.
- C. His human soul, which began to be greatly troubled in Gethsemane, was entirely cut off from all divine enlightenment. All comforts were withdrawn.
- D. Even common grace was denied Him. No sedative was allowed to dull His pain. He was crucified naked. The sun was darkened. Calvary represented a spectacle such as had never been seen before and can never be seen again. For Jesus did not suffer and die passively, as one helplessly submitting to the inevitable, but actively, as one keeping a schedule or as one fulfilling a purpose—as a Priest rendering Himself as a sin-offering.
- E. As He endured the break in the spiritual relationship with the Father He descended into hell; for hell is primarily the separation from God, a condition the exact opposite of the blessed environment of the divine presence.
- F. This does not mean that Christ's soul suffered any remorse or sense of guilt, which is one of the torments of the damned. He had no sin-consciousness since He Himself was innocent.
- G. And after the allotted suffering was finished—or the allotted offering was rendered—the divine light broke in upon His soul again and we hear Him say both, “It is finished,” and “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”