

Text

Galatians 3:11-14

¹¹ Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.”^[d] ¹² But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.” ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— ¹⁴ so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit^[e] through faith.

Main Point

Passive and Active Obedience of Jesus

Introduction (300)

Hook

How big of a deal is it to obey God?

Is it just beneficial? Simply a good idea for a happy life?

Or is it a matter of life and death? A matter of heaven or hell?

The bible makes it clear that obedience is crucial for our eternal destination.

Adam disobeyed and plunged the human race into death.

We all disobey and deserve eternal punishment.

But Jesus Christ obeyed and secured salvation.

What was it about the obedience of Jesus Christ that secured our salvation? How can his obedience have anything to do with me? With you? What about your obedience? What importance does that have?

From the confession

Today we continue our study through chapter 8 of the 1689 and we have reached paragraph 5 which focuses on the Obedience of Jesus.

Let me read the first portion of that paragraph:

This office the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake, which that he might discharge he was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfil it, and underwent the punishment due to us, which we should have borne and suffered, being made sin and a curse for us; enduring most grievous sorrows in his soul, and most painful sufferings in his body;

Outline

To help us work through this topic, we will first look at the

1. The Need for Obedience, then
2. The Passive Obedience of Christ and finally, the
3. The Active Obedience of Christ

Part 1 – Need for Obedience

Exposition

The Law has precepts and sanctions

So let's begin by thinking about the need for obedience.

To help us here we need to remind ourselves of the way God's law is structured. It is helpful to think of two broad categories of God's law.

On one side you have precepts. These are the raw rules if you like. "Do not murder", "Do not commit adultery", "Love the Lord your God with all your heart soul and mind", and so on.

There are things you must do and there are things you must not do. These are the precepts.

But the law also has sanctions. Consequences if you like. Positive consequences for keeping the precepts and negative consequences for failing to follow the precepts.

The precepts (rules) and sanctions (consequences) go hand in hand to form the Law.

And because God is Holy and Perfect, because God is Just and the only one worthy of worship, breaking his precepts has serious consequences. Serious sanctions.

Example from scripture – Breaking law=Death

Turn with me to Deut 27. Let me read verse 26, but notice that it comes at the end of a list of curses for breaking God's law. Verse 26 is basically a summary:

²⁶ *“Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.” ~~And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’~~*

Think also of the most concise verse on this topic. The first part of Rom 6:23 makes the sanction for breaking God’s law extremely clear:

²³ *For the wages of sin is death, ~~but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.~~*

The consequences for breaking God’s law is death.

Example from Scripture – Must keep for life

And we also see the reverse clearly in scripture. Only those who keep the law deserve a reward.

If you are still in Deuteronomy, look at the start of chapter 28, verses 1-2:

Deut 28:1-2

“And if you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. ² And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God.

If you obey, if you are careful to do all his commandments, if you obey the voice of the lord, then there will be blessings and life.

Or in the words of Jesus, the same principle applies in Luke 10:25-28 where we see a lawyer seeking eternal life:

²⁵ *And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”*

²⁶ He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?”

²⁷ And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.”

²⁸ And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

Jesus is not assuming that the lawyer can actually do this, but he emphatically and clearly spells out to inherit eternal life, to live, one must keep God's precepts.

Only those who keep his law completely will receive eternal life.

No middle ground

The thing to notice here is there is no middle ground. No neutral ground. Either you keep the entire law and you receive life. Or you fail to keep it and you receive death.

Anyone who fails to keep the rules deserves punishment.

And on the other side, **only** those who keep **all** the rules deserve a reward.

When sharing the gospel, we often focus on the fact that breaking God's law deserves a punishment, and hence highlight the need for Jesus dying on the Cross to pay for our sins.

But the situation is even more serious than needing to remove our debt if we want to go to heaven. Under

God's law, only those who keep the law perfectly will receive eternal life. Only those who are righteous.

Sinners are doubly dammed. They have committed crimes against God, and they have neglected to do the things which would deserve an eternal reward.

Application

God is Just and will not see disobedience unpunished

Even with this brief reminder of the precepts and sanctions of God's law, we are reminded that God is just, holy and perfect. He cannot, and will not, overlook matters of disobedience.

We cannot think that God will "just forgive and forget" sin. Nor that he will lower the bar to fill up heaven. This is a misrepresentation of the one true God.

His law is a representation of what he permits, and his standards do not change.

We can be confident that God will see justice served on all wickedness and evil in this world. He promises it, and his character demands it.

But this should also fill us with fear and trembling if we rely on our own works. How often have you broken God's law? Have you kept all his rules?

The God of the universe rightly punishes sinners. His law gives us no room to doubt that.

Link

And so it is with this context of God's law that we turn our attention to the Obedience of Jesus.

To help understand the complete nature of his obedience, theologians have distinguished two angles to view his obedience.

There is the Passive obedience of Christ and the Active obedience of Christ.

We will see these are inseparable and organically related, but the categories are helpful, especially when thinking about the just requirements of God's law.

First, we will look at the Passive Obedience of Christ, then we will turn our attention to the Active Obedience of Christ.

Part 2 – Passive Obedience

Exposition

Submitted to Die and Suffer Punishment for sins

When talking about the passive obedience of Jesus, this refers to him submitting to suffer and die to pay the punishment for sins.

In one sense there is nothing passive about it. Jesus went through great effort and turmoil when he suffered and died for the punishment for sins. His passive obedience was full of action.

It is called passive because it refers to Jesus being the recipient of punishment and wrath. He was being acted upon and still obeyed. Hence the term passive obedience.

Jesus suffered much in his life, and in a way, his suffering for the sins of others began the moment of his incarnation.

But his passive obedience culminates in the last days before his execution, and climaxes with his death on the cross.

Gethsemane

We see Jesus obedient in the face of suffering when he was in the Garden of Gethsemane.

He was deeply troubled because he was about to be made sin.

He was about to be declared guilty of innumerable sins.

He was about to face the wrath of God against sin.

He was about to face the curse that belongs to those who break God's law.

He was about to face the just consequence for breaking God's law.

And in the face of that Horror, we see Jesus obey. He says "*nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.*"

He willingly obeys, he willingly submits to the suffering.

Unjust Trails

And then, when Jesus was put on trial, again we see him obedient in the face of injustice.

1 Peter 2:23 describes it well

²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

Although Pilate found him innocent, Jesus was condemned as a law-breaker. In himself he was innocent, but as he represented sinners, he was guilty.

In a mocking and sadistic gesture, the Roman soldiers twist a crown of thorns and drive it onto his head.

A crown of thorns. Thorns. The very thing that God used to represent the curse of sin on this world when He cursed mankind after the fall.

And here we find Jesus carrying the curse for sin on our behalf. The crown of thorns a graphic picture of an even greater horror Jesus is facing.

The Cross

And his passive obedience takes him all the way to the cross. All the way to death.

At the cross, he endured the untold agony of crucifixion and the crushing reality of being rejected by his friends.

But more horrifically, he endured the rejection of God himself.

At the cross, he became a curse. At the cross, he endured the right punishment of the law.

Like the crown of thorns is a graphic picture of sin, the cross is a graphic picture of the curse of God.

Gal 3:13, quoting from Deuteronomy 21:23 makes that explicit for us:

¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—

The cross was a symbol of God's curse. The symbol is horrific in its own right, but the reality is even worse. Jesus became a cure for us. He endured the wrath of God reserved for sinners.

And Jesus endured this suffering till the end.

Till he breathed his last and died.

Bring our negative to Zero

From the Garden of Gethsemane, to the unjust trials and all the way to the cross we see the passive obedience of Jesus highlighted.

He was enduring the punishment that breaking God's law deserved.

Remember the demands of the law. Remember the consequences of breaking God's rules.

Those who break it will be cursed. Those who break it will die.

Jesus suffered and died in order to fulfil those requirements on our behalf.

He became a curse so that we did not have to.

He drank the cup of God's justice so that we did not have to.

He died so that we do not have to face eternal death.

Jesus provides a way to settle our debt with God. He provides a way to clean our slate and blank our ledger.

He provides a way to wipe our record of wrongs away. Not by avoiding justice and simply asking God to forgive and forget sin. No, but by fulfilling justice. By giving his own life as the punishment.

Application

We can rely on Jesus alone to escape the punishment of Hell.

The work of Jesus on the cross is the only way to escape the punishments of Hell. God's law is very clear.

²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Do you recognise the fact that you have broken God's law? Do you feel that guilt that doesn't seem to go away?

Our sinful actions against God condemn us. Be it disobeying parents, a lustful look, a word of gossip, a heart of anger or whatever sinful action... these condemn us.

That feeling of guilt is there for a reason.

It is there because you are guilty.

You are guilty of breaking God's commandments.

That guilt is good because it is warning you.

Warning you that a punishment must be served.

Either you will pay for your sins, or you can trust that Jesus paid on your behalf.

If you struggle to trust that Jesus paid the punishment for your sins, then look to him in the Garden as he is about to drink the cup of God's wrath.

Look to him wearing that crown of thorns as he carries the guilt and shame of sin.

Look to him on the cross being made a curse and paying the right requirements of the law on your behalf.

Someone must pay for your sins, will it be you? Or will you trust the work of Jesus?

What will you rely on?

Link

But if you have been listening carefully, clearing our debt to zero is only half our problem.

God's law also requires us to perfectly obey his law to be welcomed into heaven.

A blank slate is not good enough. We need a life of good deeds if we hope to have eternal life.

This brings us to the Active Obedience of Jesus.

Part 3 – Active Obedience

Exposition

Keeping God's commands

Jesus lived on earth for 33 years. He came to earth as a baby and grew as a human.

Why did Jesus not simply appear as a fully grown man and start his public ministry immediately?

There are a number of reasons, but let's highlight one at this point.

From a mere infant to adulthood, Jesus was forging a genuine human righteousness. He was building the list of good deeds. He was populating the ledger with genuine good works performed by a human.

He was fulfilling the rules, or the precepts of the law that would deserve the blessings of the law. He was fulfilling the rules of the law which would deserve eternal life.

Remember Deut 28:1-2

“And if you faithfully obey ... [He] will set you high above all the nations of the earth. ² And all these blessings shall come upon you...if you obey the voice of the Lord your God.

Jesus was faithful to obey. Again and again, we are told that he was without sin. Even his enemies agreed that he was blameless. Pilate declared him innocent, and the Sanhedrin had to lie to accuse him.

Active Obedience tested

And his Obedience was put to the test multiple times.

We think of his temptations in the Desert where Satan tempts him with the desires of the flesh, and the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life. And we see Jesus not only resisting but, responding in a God glorifying way: Turning to scripture, relying on the Father, and resisting the Devil faithfully.

Hebrews 4:15 tells us that Jesus is *“one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”*

Ultimate active obedience

Jesus fulfilled the precepts of the law to the full extent.

We are told that Love for God and love for neighbour are the summary of the precepts of the law.

During his suffering and torment on the cross, Jesus was obeying and fulfilling exactly that.

Love for God as he fulfilled His will,
and love for neighbour as he suffered and died to rescue them.

There is much more evidence to point to, but we can confidently say that Jesus fulfilled the law. He obeyed fully and completely as God originally intended humans to obey.

And so, Jesus, by his obedience, earned the blessings promised by the law. By his active obedience, he earned eternal life.

But the stunning thing is that he earned it not for himself, but for those who would trust in him.

Active obedience imputed to us.

This should blow our minds.

His painstaking and sorrow-filled obedience was not for his sake but for ours. He obeyed the law for our sake.

Listen to how Romans 5:19 puts it:

Rom 5:19

¹⁹ For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners [Talking of Adam], so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

We, (the many sinners), are made righteous (that is, are seen by God to have fulfilled the entire law of God) because Jesus fully obeyed the law. – By one man's obedience we are made righteous.

Or see how Paul explains it to the Galatians:

Gal 3:12-14

¹² But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.” ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—

This is describing the passive obedience we have just been talking about, but then Paul goes on to describe sinners receiving the blessings of the law because they are in Christ! V14

*¹⁴ so that **in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham** might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit^[e] through faith.*

Do we see what Paul is saying? We can receive the blessings promised to Abraham, the promise of being children of God, the promise of eternal life if we are IN Christ.

Those who are in Christ are recognised to have fulfilled the law and God will grant them eternal life.

Double illustration of imputed righteousness

And so we can see that Jesus’s obedience completes our salvation.

Not only does he pay our debt and bring our account from the deep negatives to zero, but he also accredits, or imputes to us all his good deeds to our account, and puts our account into the high positives.

Or picture it this way.

He removes our filthy rags we were clothes with. Rags reeking of excrement and puke. Rags offensive to all around us. He removes those offensive coverings, but he does not leave us naked. He does not leave us to find clothes of our own.

He then clothes us with the richest garments, with the finest cloth. Clothes fit for a child of a king.

Application

We can rest in his perfect obedience

So we can rest in his perfect obedience.

We can truly rely on his work to save us.

We do not need to look to our record of good deeds to give us confidence of going to heaven.

We can look to the list **of his** good deeds and rest in those.

Only then can our soul find real rest. Real peace.

Obey because we are saved, not in order to be saved.

Some have said that teaching and affirming the active obedience of Christ imputed to us will lead people to stop obeying God.

If that thought crossed your mind, in a way that is good, because you understand that your works contribute nothing to your eternal destination.

But we must remember there are many reasons why we obey God. We praise God that our eternal destination is not one of them, which should maximise all the other reasons.

We obey God to show our thanks and recognition.

We obey God to edify others.

We obey God because it is good for us.

We obey God to grow in assurance.

We obey God to stop the mouth of the adversary.

We obey God to glorify Him.

Our obedience serves many good purposes for his Glory, and our good, but our eternal destination is not one of them.

Our eternal destination is secured by the Complete obedience of Jesus.

Conclusion

As we bring our study to a close, remember that obedience is necessary for eternal life.

God's law demands it. The precepts and status are clear. But we humans failed to fulfil it.

Our failure earned us punishment, and God, in his justice, will see the consequence for sin fulfilled.

Our disobedience earned us death.

But when Jesus was on earth He obeyed. And **his obedience** changes everything for us.

Through his passive obedience, he suffered the penalty we deserved. He paid the price that breaking God's law deserved. Our sin was credited to his account and he suffered the punishment for it.

And through his active obedience, he earned eternal life. He fulfilled the law to the fullest extent in order to receive the blessings promised. And this obedience he did in order that we might live. His Righteous deeds were credited to our account and we benefit from them.

From infinite debt to infinite riches. From rags to royal robes. His righteousness is imputed to us.

The Passive and Active obedience of Christ is what we cling to for our eternal destination.

And so now we can obey him, not to work our way to heaven, but to please and glorify him.

Let us pray.