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The Active Obedience of Christ

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The Active Obedience of Christ.*(Conclusion.)*

Rom. 5, 18, 19 is a second passage which proves that the active obedience of Christ is an integral part of His vicarious satisfaction. The question here to be decided is whether the "righteousness" of Christ, His "obedience," are terms describing that one righteous act, that one act of obedience by which Christ submitted to death according to the will of God, or whether they describe His entire obedience, His righteous life in general, His universal compliance with the Law. They would have to bear the former meaning if the proposition is true that salvation was accomplished exclusively by the death of Christ. But the words of the apostle refuse to bear such an interpretation. He is using the term "righteousness," rectitude of behavior, compliance with law, without any limitations. There is no doubt what "righteousness" means Rev. 19, 8. Nobody would think of restricting it to the patience of the saints in suffering. So also here (Rom. 5, 18, 19) the words are used in their absolute sense. Nothing in the text justifies Thayer to interpret *ἑνὸς δικαίωμα*: "the righteous act of One (Christ) in His giving Himself up to death." Surely, Christ thereby proved Himself obedient. But by what right is the obedience, the righteousness of Christ in general, excluded? Righteousness means conformity with the Law. And thus the exactness of the parallel between Adam, the type, and Christ, the Antitype, is preserved. The "offense," the transgression of the Law on the part of Adam, brought ruin; the "righteousness," the fulfilment of the Law on the part of Christ, brought salvation. Zahn (Hauck): "*Δικαίωμα* here means righteous act, a factual fulfilment of the Law's requirements. But since the moral obligations of man cover, of course, his entire life and since Jesus kept them during His entire life (Gal. 4, 4; 2 Cor. 5, 21 a; Phil. 2, 8; cf. Matt. 3, 15.), *δικαίωμα* does not refer to one particular act of Christ, but summarizes the rectitude of His entire life." Stoeckhardt: "*Δικαίωμα* here means, since Christ is the subject, the righteousness which Christ exhibited. . . . It is contrasted with the *παράπτωμα* of Adam and is synonymous with *ὑπακοή*, v. 19. It means *recte factum* (Fritzsche), righteousness of Christ (Hodge). The apostle had before named the death and blood of Christ as the foundation of justification. . . . Christ was obedient unto the death of the cross, gave proof of His obedience, in a striking way, by dying on the cross. But *δικαίωμα* covers more, it comprises the whole obedience which Christ rendered God in His life, His suffering, and His death, the *obedientia activa* and *passiva*. Christ fulfilled all righteousness of the Law, rendered satisfaction not only to the punitive, but also to the mandatory justice of God. Christ's whole life on earth, including His death, was one consistent *recte factum*."

The dogmaticians adduce, further, Ps. 40, 6—8. Christ performs

His work by yielding willing obedience to God, to God's will and Law. "Thy Law is within My heart." When we find a similar phrase in Jer. 31, 33, we know at once that it describes the willing observance of the Law of God on the part of His children, an attitude demanded of all men. Why should this same phrase, when used of Christ, lose its common meaning? The obedience of Christ took in, of course, more than His fulfilment of the Law given to men. It included His assumption of the mediatorial vocation. But nothing in the text compels us to restrict it to that. That being so, the phrase stands there in its full force. The Epistle to the Hebrews, 10, 5-7, indeed, when applying this passage, stresses that phase of Christ's obedience which was exhibited in His death. The writer had a perfect right to do so. He does so, with possibly a few exceptions, throughout the epistle. But by stressing this one phase he does not exclude the other phases.—If a mere man were speaking here, all would at once understand him to be referring to the Law given to men. Exegetes like Hengstenberg, Delitzsch, Kittel, who deny the Messianic import of the Psalm, therefore naturally interpret thus: "This reception of the Thora into the inward parts is, according to Jer. 31, 33, the characteristic of the new covenant; but even in the Old Testament there is among the masses of Israel 'a people with My Law in their heart,' Is. 51, 7. . . . As such a one who had the Thora within him, not merely beside him, David presents himself on the way to the throne of God." (Delitzsch.) Now, why should the words have a different meaning when spoken by the Messiah? It presents no difficulties to us who believe that Jesus acted in all ways in our stead." *Hirschberger Bibel*: "'Thy Law is within My heart' — My heart is set on this one thing, to fulfil all the righteousness of the Law. Matt. 3, 15; 5, 17; Rom. 10, 4." Stoeckhardt, *Adventspredigten*, p. 88: "He had an open ear for God's voice and will, He cherished God's Word and Law in His heart. He obeyed God in all things and thereby served us. We have kept none of God's commandments fully. Nothing is so distasteful to us as obedience, God's command and Law. Man would rather offer sacrifices, he devises all sorts of works that do not please God. But, behold! Christ came, took our place, fulfilled what we neglected, willingly performed what we refused to do, and by His obedience rendered satisfaction to the Law of God." Luther: "Christ clearly prophesies that He alone does God's will and fulfils the Law." (IV, 156.)

According to Matt. 5, 17 the compliance with the Law belongs to the office and work of the Savior. He "came" to fulfil it. But to fulfil the Law does not mean, primarily, to explain it or to establish it as binding upon men. It does not mean at all that He came to replace it with a better Law. It means that He fulfilled it, complied with its requirements. That is the native force of the words. That is also established by the contrast in v. 19. The opposite of "breaking,"

not keeping, the Law is keeping it. Compare also the parallel expression in Matt. 3, 15. Christ kept the ordinance of God respecting Baptism, not by merely teaching men to observe it, but by complying with it personally. Zahn: "The word of prophecy is fulfilled when the prophesied event takes place; the word of command is fulfilled when the act enjoined is performed. . . . When Jesus declares that His work consists in bringing about the fulfilment of the Old Testament as the expression of the mandatory will of God, He thereby, first of all, declares that He is prepared personally to do the will of God there laid down, just as He had already in the temptation, Matt. 4, 4—10, approved Himself an Israelite believing and obeying the Scriptures." It was not a personal, but a vocational obligation ("came") and comes under His substitutional work.

Matt. 3, 15 is a most pertinent passage. "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." The ordinance respecting Baptism must be observed by Christ just as any other law and ordinance of God. It would go beyond the scope of the present article to discuss the deeper import of this declaration of Christ. All that we are concerned with at present is to point out that Christ put Himself under every law, ordinance, regulation, enjoined upon God's people. Zahn: "Christ is resolved to yield obedience to all that God's Law required of Israel, to observe also, as a member of the nation, those ordinances which presupposed the sins of the people, in which He personally did not share." Stoeckhardt: "Christ would fulfil whatever God's Law and ordinances required of men. And Israel was at that time required to receive the baptism of John." (*Bibl. Gesch. d. N. T.*, p. 23.) Kretzmann (*Pop. Com.*): "Obedience and fulfilment were the outstanding traits of the Messiah's vicarious work. In applying these He could brook no opposition. Every righteous ordinance, all religious usages, that were enjoined upon the people He wanted to fulfil." Every Jew who rejected the baptism of John was in rebellion against God. The obedience which men owe to God required that Christ, who was acting in the stead of man, receive Baptism. And God's solemn commendation of Christ's work which accompanied His baptism shows that this particular instance together with all other instances of the active obedience of Christ belongs to His redemptive work.

Take, finally, Rom. 10, 3, 4. We are agreed that Christ has made an end of the Law, abolished it (in the matter of justification), that on account of His vicarious satisfaction its requirements are no longer binding upon us. But which are these requirements of the Law? Only those imposing penalties on the transgressor? Are these the only requirements of the Law that Christ complied with in His vicarious satisfaction? The apostle's line of thought does not lead to such an assumption. He is speaking of the folly of the Jews in going about to establish their own righteousness instead of accepting

the righteousness gained for them by Christ. Now the Jews sought to establish their own righteousness, first and foremost, by fulfilling the commands of the Law. The thought how they might atone for any transgression occurring would, at most, arise as only a secondary consideration. So when the apostle tells them that there is no need of their fulfilling the Law for the purpose of justification because Christ has made an end of the Law, the natural meaning is that Christ fulfilled it for them. In other words, we cannot establish our own righteousness by our keeping of the Law, but Christ established our righteousness—how? Of course, by keeping it in our stead (and, as the case demanded, also by suffering the penalty of disobedience in our stead). Stoeckhardt: "The Law has come to an end in Christ, being replaced by the righteousness of faith. The Law makes demands on us, grave demands, demands a perfect righteousness, has therefore just been called 'the Law of righteousness.' And when all of the demands of the Law are fulfilled, the Law has come to an end, no longer has authority over us. But now Christ has fulfilled all demands of the Law in the place of men, fulfilled it perfectly." Hodge: "Their own righteousness,' which Theophylact correctly interprets *τὴν ἐξ ἑργῶν ἰδίων καὶ πόρων κατορθουμένην* . . . This abrogation of the Law is not by setting it aside, but by fulfilling its demands. It is because Christ is the fulfiller of the Law that He is the end of it. The word *Law* is obviously here used in its prevalent sense throughout this epistle, for the whole rule of duty prescribed to man. . . . That Law is intended which has been fulfilled, satisfied, or abrogated by Jesus Christ."

There is (3) another group of passages which in describing the mode of redemption specifically name, besides the suffering of Christ, other acts of His life, thus disposing of the assertion that Scripture nowhere describes redemption as being effected by anything else than His suffering on His last day, by anything that occurred previously, by any other act of Christ. According to Gal. 4, 4. 5 the Son of God was, in order to redeem us, "*made of a woman.*" The redemptive work of Christ began with His conception and birth. "Conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary," is, on the basis of Scripture, put on the same plane as "suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead." According to Phil. 2, 6 ff. the entire obedience of Christ, exhibited throughout His life, belongs to the work of redemption. In describing what the Savior did for us, the apostle tells us that the self-exinanition of Jesus set in at the time of the incarnation. And the very phrase "He became obedient unto death" (*μέχρι θανάτου*, "even unto death," R. V.) by emphasizing the dying as the climax of His obedience does not exclude, but includes, all other acts of obedience. *Exp. Gr. N. T.*: "As obedient, He gave Himself wholly up to His Father's will. And the course of following that will led as far as (*μέχρι*) death itself." The act described Matt.

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3, 15 was not an act of suffering, but still a redemptive act. Acts 10, 36—43 describes the work of Him "through whose name whosoever believeth on Him shall receive remission of sins." But the passage does not speak exclusively of His death, but of all things which He did: He who "went about doing good." The Gospel of salvation would not be complete if only the story of His death on the cross were told. Finally, in Matt. 20, 28, which describes the redemptive work of Christ, the purpose of His coming ("He came"), "to minister" and "to give His life," are coordinated. The ministry, the serving of Christ was not accomplished solely through His death. It included that. His death was the climax of His service—"to that extent does His service go; cf. Phil. 2, 8." (*Exp. Gr. N. T.*) But the form of the expression used forces us to include in the work of Christ every other form of ministering, every other act of Christ that comes under the category of loving, humble service. Zahn: "It is only in Jesus, in His entire person, as He comes to us in teaching and living, in His deeds and His suffering up to the completion of His work, that we receive all present and all future blessings of the βασιλεία, including the forgiveness of sins."

Christ's entire life on earth up to His death served for our redemption. Kromayer: "*Christus per omnes aetatis nostrae gradus venit, ut immundam nostram conceptionem et nativitatem radicibus curaret.*" Luther: "This is the right faith, rich in grace, demanded by God's Word and work: you must confidently believe that Christ was born for you, that His birth is yours, took place for your good. . . . Christ has a pure, innocent, holy birth; man has an unclean, sinful, damned birth, as David declares Ps. 51, 7. This cannot be cured other than through the clean birth of Christ. . . . Behold, Christ takes away from us, takes unto Himself, our birth and sinks it into His birth and gives us His own, His birth rendering us clean and new, as though it were our birth. Every Christian should rejoice and glory in this birth exactly as if he, like Christ, had been born bodily of Mary." (XI, 126 f.) "For Himself He needed not to be circumcised, as little as He was required for His person to obey His mother or to die on the cross. . . . But He did it for our sake. . . . He possessed all righteousness and holiness required by the Law, without rendering this obedience to the Law. But He placed Himself under the Law for our sake." (XIII, 1534 f.)—It will thus be seen that the gospels, setting out to tell the story of Him "who shall save His people from their sins," Matt. 1, 21, and then telling the story of His holy life no less than that of His innocent death, have not brought ill-matched parts together, but present a most harmonious structure.

Studying the matter from another angle (4), we call attention to the Scriptural meaning and use of the term "righteousness." First, who has that quality which "the Law of righteousness," Rom. 9, 31, demands? The Law requires righteous deeds, the rectitude of be-

havior and the rectitude of disposition. He is a just, a righteous man who "doeth them," Gal. 3, 12, who performs all the deeds prescribed by the Law. The righteousness of the Law is fulfilled by them who walk according to the Law, Rom. 8, 4. The righteousness demanded by the Law is a positive quality. He is a good citizen who lives up to the law of the land. The lawbreaker is not a good citizen. And the pardon he may receive does not constitute him a good citizen. He may become a good citizen, but that only through abiding by the law. Equally so the Law of God recognizes no one as righteous unless he abides by the Law. Now mark, in the second place, that God requires *this righteousness* of all who would enter into eternal life. "The man that doeth them shall live in them," Gal. 3, 12, the man that "continueth in all things which are written in the Book of the Law to do them," Gal. 3, 10. According to God's own statement no man will be granted entrance into heaven unless it can be shown that he has fulfilled every single commandment. Where is Scriptural warrant for the claim that this provision of the Law has been abrogated? The Gospel certainly bears the good message that the Law has been abrogated. But how? By this, that Christ made an end of the Law by fulfilling it in our stead. But where is Scriptural warrant for the claim that in the fulfilling of the Law for the purpose of abrogating it Christ looked only to its mandatory provisions and had no need to pay attention to its mandatory provisions? The provision: "Cursed is every one," etc., Gal. 3, 13, cannot be annulled. It must be executed — and it has been executed on Christ. Only thus could it come to an end. The provision "This do and thou shalt live," Gal. 3, 12; Rom. 10, 5, can just as little be annulled. This demand must be met — and Christ has met it for us. Those who contend that Christ's submission to the punitive provisions of the Law was sufficient for our salvation must produce clear *Scriptural* statements to the effect that the mandatory provisions of the Law were less inviolable than the others. In other words, their contention does not square with the Scriptural definition of the righteousness required by the Law and of the inviolability of all its demands. This contention, in the third place, does violence to the statements that "Christ is made unto us righteousness," 1 Cor. 1, 30, that "He shall be called The Lord Our Righteousness," Jer. 23, 6. They cannot mean anything less than that Christ acquired for us the righteousness required by the Law, which we are unable to produce. The *natural* meaning is that Christ supplies what we lack, that the righteousness which we could not achieve has been procured by Him, that He kept the Law in our stead. And that is brought out in the strongest possible manner in Phil. 3, 9 and Rom. 10, 3. The righteousness of Christ takes the place of the righteousness of men. What men could not achieve Christ achieved for them. Men who fail to establish their own righteousness, fail to keep the Law, are told that Christ supplies

the need. How can any one fail to hear the apostle saying that Christ's *obedientia activa* no less than the *obedientia passiva* covers our disobedience? A. R. Fausset, on Phil. 3, 9: "The righteousness of faith,' in Paul's sense, is the righteousness or perfect holiness of Christ appropriated by faith, as the objective ground of confidence for the believer." Stoeckhardt, on Rom. 10, 4: "By virtue of Christ's fulfilling the Law and thereby bringing it to an end there exists righteousness, a perfect righteousness, for every one that believes. Man needs but to take over by faith the fulfilment of the Law, the obedience of Christ, this righteousness, which is a finished product." Quenstedt, as quoted above: "Since man was not only to be freed from the wrath of God, the just Judge, but also needed, in order that he might stand before God, a righteousness, which could not be acquired except by the fulfilment of the Law, therefore Christ took both upon Himself and not only suffered for us, but also satisfied the Law in every way in order that this His fulfilment and obedience might be imputed to us for righteousness."

Finally (5), the counter-arguments adduced in support of the proposition that Scripture teaches that our redemption was effected solely and exclusively through the death on the cross need to be examined. Passages such as John 1, 29; Is. 53, 7; Rev. 5, 6, 9; Rom. 5, 10; 1 John 1, 7; John 12, 24; 1 Cor. 1, 18; John 3, 14; 6, 53; Rev. 7, 14, are quoted as the first proof. — Scripture certainly teaches that Christ redeemed us through His death on the cross. But since Scripture also sets forth the redemptive value of Christ's holy life, the passages quoted cannot mean that the death of Christ was the sole instrument of salvation, the sole price of redemption. The passages speaking of the passive obedience of Christ must not be employed for the purpose of invalidating the passages speaking of His active obedience. If that were permissible, the matter might just as easily be reversed. Scripture does indeed stress the death of Christ. It does so because His work reached its culmination in His death. His death forms the capstone of His work. But the emphasis placed on the culmination of a work is never meant to belittle or even reject as worthless the rest of the work. In fact, it is one piece of work, coherent, indivisible, the active and passive obedience being brought in Scripture under one term: "obedience" (Rom. 5), "under the Law" (Gal. 4). Briefly, the passages quoted must not be understood in an exclusive sense. Gerhard, as quoted above: "Although in many passages of Scripture the work of redemption is ascribed to Christ's death and the shedding of His blood, yet this must be accepted by no means exclusively, as though by it the holy life of Christ were excluded from the work of redemption; but it must be regarded as occurring for the reason that nowhere does the fact that the Lord has loved and redeemed us shine forth more clearly than in His Passion, death, and wounds, as the devout old

teachers say, and because the death of Christ is, as it were, the last line and completion, the τέλος, the end and perfection, of the entire obedience, as the apostle says, Phil. 2, 8. Why, it is altogether impossible in this merit to separate the active from the passive obedience." The exegetical method employed in the argument under discussion would, if applied to other passages, result in unscriptural teaching; if applied to human writings, in absurdities. Sound exegesis requires us to take, for instance, Acts 20, 28, 1 John 2, 13, 14, Eph. 6, 4, Eccles. 3, 9, not *sensu diviso, sed composito*. God purchased the Church with His own blood; did He not die for the world? The Word of God abideth in the young men; not in the fathers? The mothers as well as the fathers are charged to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. "The blessing of the father establisheth the houses of children; but the curse of the mother rooteth out foundations"—who would understand these statements in an exclusive sense? Would you deny that, because Luther in the explanation of the Second Article mentions only the passive obedience, he does not in the other statements quoted teach the active obedience?

As to the argument that according to Zech. 3, 9 ("I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day") redemption was accomplished not in thirty-three years, but in one day, it will be sufficient to refer to "the *days* of his flesh" of Heb. 5, 7. Whatever may be the meaning of "one" day in Zech. 3, 9, it cannot mean that redemption was to be accomplished in twelve or twenty-four hours.

It has been urged in support of the proposition under discussion that the prepositions *ἀντί* and *ὑπέρ* are never used in Scripture in connection with the acts of the active obedience of Christ.—This argument would have force only if the idea of substitution could be expressed in no other way than by the use of these prepositions. These prepositions are not used Gal. 4, 4, 5 and Rom. 5, 18, 19. But it will not be denied that these passages express the substitutionary character of the work mentioned. Christ redeemed them that were under the Law by being made under the Law in their place. And in Rom. 5 Adam and Christ are represented as acting in our stead. Those who take the "obedience" of Rom. 5 and the "under the Law" of Gal. 4 to refer to the passive obedience of Christ have a perfect right to insert, in thought, *ὑπέρ* and *ἀντί*. We who take it to refer to the obedience of Christ as a whole, both active and passive, have the same right. Then, we have in Matt. 20, 28 the *ἀντί* in so many letters. It belongs, of course, grammatically only to "give His life." But since the work of Christ includes the ministering as well as the giving of His life and has value only because of its substitutionary nature, the *sense* is not violated by making the *ἀντί* apply, in thought, also to the ministering. But let that go. We shall content ourselves

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 with pointing out that it is a most arbitrary proceeding to select of a number of synonymous phrases one of these as indispensably necessary for the expression of the relation in question. For instance, in the words of the institution the phrase "for the remission of sins" is used only in connection with the blood. Does it follow that the body is not given "for the remission of sins"?

But there is Heb. 9, 22!—Heb. 9, 22 remains in full force. Without the shedding of the blood of Jesus there would have been no remission of sins. The passive obedience of Christ was absolutely necessary.—And the entire epistle makes no mention of an active obedience!—If so, we will look into the other books of the New Testament. It does stress the death of Christ. That is done in accordance with the theme of the epistle. But is the active obedience entirely ignored? One might find it in 5, 8 ("This obedience He learned, as He proceeded step by step along His painful path, until the lesson was finished and the obedience was consummated on the cross." *Pulp. Com.*) and 4, 15.

How the active obedience of Christ meets a most pressing need of the Christian, who is oppressed not only with the fear of the punishment incurred, but also with the sense of the guilt arising from his lack of righteousness, Luther thus sets forth: "Now, here sets in the joyful exchange and strife. Since Christ, the Godman, who never committed a sin and possesses a holiness which is invincible, eternal, and almighty, takes over the sins of the believing soul, faith being her wedding-ring, as His own, altogether as if He had committed them, all sins are devoured and drowned in Him. For His invincible righteousness overpowers all sins. Thus the soul is absolutely cleared and freed of all her sins by virtue of her dowry, that is, through faith, and is endowed with the eternal righteousness of her Bridegroom, Christ. A happy householdry indeed! The rich and noble and good Bridegroom Christ wedding the poor, despised, wicked wench, freeing her from all evil and endowing her with all goods! Thus it becomes impossible that her sins should condemn her, for they are now lying on Christ and destroyed in Him. On the other hand, she owns through her Husband such a rich righteousness that she can again stand in the face of all sins, though she had committed them." (19, 995.) And she takes up the happy song:—

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
 My beauty are, my glorious dress;
 Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
 With joy shall I lift up my head.

When from the dust of death I rise
 To claim my mansion in the skies,
 E'en then this shall be all my plea:
 Jesus hath lived and died for me.

E.