

Digging Deep: Exploring the Joy of Systematic Theology
Class 22: The Doctrine of Salvation, part 1
Double Imputation and the Passive & Active Obedience of Jesus Christ

"... this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."
John 17. 3

I. What Does It Mean?

The active obedience of Jesus – persistently, completely & perfectly loving God and His neighbor with His whole being in fulfillment of the Law.

Q. 48. How did Christ humble himself in his life?

A. Christ humbled himself in his life by subjecting himself to the Law, which he perfectly fulfilled, and by struggling with the indignities of the world, the temptations of Satan, and the infirmities in his flesh, whether common to the nature of mankind or particularly accompanying his low condition.

Westminster Larger Catechism, Q&A 48

The passive obedience of Jesus – bearing the wrath of God in our place by taking the curse of God on Himself for the disobedience of His people.

Q. What do you understand by the word "suffered"?

A. That during his whole life on earth, but especially at the end, Christ sustained in body and soul the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race. This he did in order that, by his suffering as the only atoning sacrifice, he might deliver us, body and soul, from eternal condemnation, and gain for us God's grace, righteousness, and eternal life.

Heidelberg Catechism, LD 15, Q&A 37

[We cannot] allocate certain phases or acts of our Lord's life on earth to the **active obedience** and certain other phases & acts to the **passive obedience**. The distinction between the active & passive obedience is not a distinction of periods of time. It is our Lord's whole work of obedience in every phase & period that is described as active and passive, and we must avoid the mistake of thinking that the active obedience applies to the obedience of his life & the passive obedience to the obedience of his final sufferings and death.

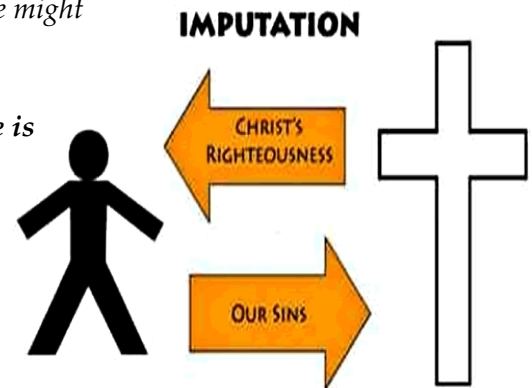
The real use & purpose of the formula is to emphasize the two distinct aspects of our Lord's obedience on our behalf. The truth expressed rests upon the recognition that **the law of God has both penal sanctions and positive demands**. It demands not only the full discharge of its precepts but also the infliction of penalty for all infractions and shortcomings. It is this twofold demand of the law of God that is taken into account when we speak of the active & passive obedience of Christ. Christ as the Redeemer of His people came under the curse and condemnation due to sin **and** he also fulfilled the law of God in all its positive requirements. In other words, he took care of the guilt of sin and perfectly fulfilled the demands of righteousness. He perfectly met both the penal and the preceptive requirements of God's law. The passive obedience refers to the former & the active obedience to the latter.

John Murray, Redemption: Accomplished & Applied

For our sake he made him to be sin **who knew no sin**, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5.21).

You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and **in him there is no sin**. (1 John 1.5)

Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of **a lamb without blemish or spot**. (1 Pet. 1.18–19).



For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet **without sin**. (Heb. 4.15).

For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, **holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners**, and exalted above the heavens. (Heb. 7.26).

... because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, **righteousness and sanctification and redemption** (1 Cor. 1.30)

For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5.19)

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. (1 John 2.1)

Pilate went out again and said to them, "See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him." (John 19.4)

... I always do the things that are pleasing to him. (John 8.29)

Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. (Isaiah 53.11)

II. How Does It Apply?

1. A new appreciation for the beauty of Jesus.

*I will glory in my Redeemer, my life He bought, my love He owns,
I have no longings for another, I'm satisfied in Him alone.*

*I will glory in my Redeemer, His faithfulness my standing place,
Though foes are mighty and rush upon me, my feet are firm, held by His grace.*

2. A new foundation for confidence

Only a fraction of the present body of professing Christians are solidly appropriating the justifying work of Christ in their lives. Many have so light an apprehension of God's holiness and of the extent and guilt of their sin that consciously they see little need for justification, although below the surface of their lives they are deeply guilt-ridden and insecure. Many others have a theological commitment to [the doctrine of justification], but in their day-to-day existence they rely on their sanctification for justification... drawing their assurance of acceptance with God from their sincerity, their past experience of conversion, their recent religious performance, or the relative infrequency of their conscious, willful disobedience. Few know how to start each day with a thoroughgoing stand upon Luther's platform: *you are accepted*, looking outward in faith and claiming the wholly alien righteousness of Christ as the only ground for acceptance, relaxing in that quality of trust which will produce increasing sanctification as faith is active in love and gratitude.

Richard Lovelace, Dynamics of Spiritual Life