

Of the Active Obedience of Christ in His State of Humiliation.

by John Gill

Christ's active obedience refers to his perfect obedience to the law of God throughout his life, even unto death, in order to bring redemption and salvation to his people.

Scripture: Isaiah 42:1, Matthew 22:37, Galatians 4:4, Philippians 2:7, Hebrews 5:8

Topics: "Justification By Faith", "Active Obedience of Christ"

Description

John Gill emphasizes the active obedience of Christ during His state of humiliation, illustrating how He took on the form of a servant and fulfilled the law of God throughout His life, even unto death. He highlights that Christ's obedience was not only to the moral law but also to the ceremonial and civil laws, demonstrating His role as the Servant of God. Gill explains that Christ's perfect obedience is essential for the justification of believers, as it fulfills the law's demands on their behalf. This obedience was voluntary, complete, and performed in the stead of His people, making it well-pleasing to God. Ultimately, Gill presents Christ's active obedience as the foundation of salvation and righteousness for all who believe in Him.

Transcript

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity

Book 5--Chapter 3

OF THE ACTIVE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST IN HIS STATE OF HUMILIATION

The humiliation of Christ may be seen in his obedience to God, through the whole course of his life, even unto death; in order to which, 1. First, He took upon him the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7), and really became one; even the Servant of God: and this is an instance of his amazing humility and condescension; that he, who was the Son of God, of the same nature with God, and equal to him, the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, should voluntarily become the Servant of him; which the apostle observes with astonishment; "though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered!" (Heb. 5:8).

He was chosen of God, in his eternal purposes, to be his Servant; and therefore is called, his Servant elect (Isa. 42:1). He called him to the work and office of a servant; and said unto him, in the everlasting council and covenant of grace and peace, "Thou art my Servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified" (Isa. 49:3). And Christ, the Son of God, accepted of this office; agreed to be the Servant of God, to come into the world, and do his will and work (Ps. 40:7,8). And accordingly, he was prophesied of as the Servant of the Lord, that should come (Zech. 3:8; Isa. 42:1).

In the fulness of time he was sent, and came not to be ministered unto, as a monarch, but to minister as a servant; and he quickly appeared to be under a law, and was subject to the law of circumcision; and being had in his infancy to Egypt, the house of servants; to his ancestors, according to the flesh, was an emblem of that servile state he was come into: and very early did he declare, that he must be about his Father's business: as a servant, he had work to do, and much work, and that very laborious; which lay, not only in working miracles, which were works his Father gave him to finish, as demonstrations of his Deity, and prods of his Messiahship; nor only in going about from place to place, healing all manner of diseases, and so doing good to the bodies of men; nor only in preaching the gospel, for which he was qualified and sent, and thereby did good to the souls of men; but chiefly in fulfilling the law of God, both in the preceptive and penal part of it, in the room and stead of his people; and thereby wrought out the great work of all he came to do, the redemption and salvation of men; for this was the work assigned him by God his Father, as his servant; "to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel"; that is, to redeem and save the chosen people: this was the work his Father gave him to do; this was the work which was before him when he came; and this is the work which he has finished; for he has obtained eternal redemption; and is become the author of eternal salvation.

Now throughout the whole of his work, as a servant, he appeared very diligent and constant; very early he discovered an inclination to be about it; very eager was he at it; when in it, it was his meat and drink; and he was continually, constantly employed in it (John 4:34; 9:4). Nor did he leave working till he had completed the whole. In all which he was faithful to him that appointed him; and very justly did he obtain the character of God's "righteous Servant" (Isa. 11:5; 53:11). 2.

Secondly, When Christ became incarnate, and took upon him the form of a servant, and really was one; he, as such, was subject to the law of God: hence these two things are joined together, as having a close connection with each other; "Made of a woman; made under the law" (Gal. 4:4). 2a. First, Christ was made under the judicial, or civil law of the Jews; he was by birth a Jew, and is called one (Zech. 8:23). It is manifest that he sprung from the tribe of Judah; which tribe, in process of time, gave the name of Jews to the whole people of Israel; and because our Lord was of that tribe, he is called the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Heb 7:14; Rev. 5:5).

He was born at Bethlehem, in the tribe of Judah, and was of the seed of David, who was of that tribe; and is therefore said to be the root and offspring of David (Rev. 22:16). Wherefore, since he, the salvation of God, and Saviour of men, as to his human nature, was of the Jews; it was fit and proper he should be subject to their civil government, and to the laws of it, as he was: for though he was charged with sedition, yet falsely, for he was subject to their government, though it was then in the hands of the Romans; and not only paid tribute himself, but directed others to do the same, saying, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's (Matthew 17:24-27; 22:17-21).

And to this law he submitted, 2a1. That it might appear he was of the nation of the Jews, as it was prophesied of, and promised he should; as, that he should be of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of

Judah, and of the Jewish fathers, according to the flesh; all which he was (Gen. 22:18; 49:10; Matthew 1:1; Rom. 9:5). 2a2. That it might be manifest that he came before the Jewish polity was at an end; as it was foretold he should (Gen. 49:10). And Christ being under and subject to the civil law, showed that the sceptre and lawgiver had not departed, but civil government yet continued; though now, for many hundreds of years it has wholly departed, and is not, in any form or shape, among that people; which has fulfilled the prophecy in Hosea 3:4.

"The children of Israel shall be many days without a king"; and therefore the Messiah must be come long ago, before they were without one, as he did; for Herod was king when he was born. 2a3. Christ became subject to the civil law, to teach his followers subjection to civil magistrates; and this is the doctrine of his apostles, frequently inculcated by them, to be subject to the higher powers, to obey magistrates, and submit to every ordinance of men (Rom. 13:1; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13). 2b.

Secondly, Christ was made under the ceremonial law, and became subject to that; he was circumcised when eight days old, according to that law; and was presented in the temple at the time of his mother's purification, as the law required: at twelve years of age he came with his parents to Jerusalem, to keep the passover; and when he had entered on his public office, it was his custom constantly to attend synagogue worship; and it was one of the last actions of his life, to keep the passover with his disciples.

Now he became subject to this law, 2b1. Because it looked to him, and centered in him; it was a shadow of good things to come by him: the feasts of tabernacles, passover, and Pentecost; the sabbaths of the seventh day of the week, and of the seventh year, and of the seven times seventh year, were shadows, of which he is the substance: all the ablutions, washings, and purifications enjoined by it, were typical of cleansing by his blood: and all the sacrifices of it, daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly, all pointed to his sacrifice. 2b2.

He was made under this law, in order to fulfil it; for it became him to fulfil all righteousness, ceremonial as well as moral righteousness; and all things in it were to have an end, and had an end, even a fulfilling end in him. 2b3. He was made under it, that by fulfilling it he might abolish it, and put an end to it; for when it was fulfilled, it was no longer useful; and there was a necessity of the disannulling of it, because of its weakness and unprofitableness; and accordingly, this law of commandments was abolished; this handwriting of ordinances was blotted out; this middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles was broken down; and the rituals of it pronounced weak and beggarly elements; and believers in Christ were directed to take care they were not entangled with this yoke of bondage; nor should they judge and condemn one another for any neglect of it; Christ has answered to the whole, by being made under it. 2c.

Thirdly, Christ was made under the moral law; under this he was as a man; being "made of a woman", in course he was made under the law; for every man, as a creature of God, is subject to him, its Creator and Lawgiver; and to his law: to fear God, and keep his commandments, is the whole duty of man; and is the duty of every man; and was the duty of Christ, as man. But besides this, Christ was made under it, as the surety and substitute of his people; as he became their surety, he engaged to fulfil the law in their room and stead; this is a very principal part of that will of God, which he declared his readiness to come and do; saying, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God! thy law is within my heart" (Ps. 40:7,8). 2c1.

He was made under it, in order to fulfil the precepts of it; which to do is righteousness (Deut. 6:25), and is that righteousness which he undertook to work out in perfect agreement with the commands of the law; and which he perfectly obeyed; for he always did the things which pleased the Father, and all that was

pleasing to him; even every command of his righteous law; nor did he fail in anyone instance; he never committed one sin; and so did not transgress the law in anyone particular; but was holy and harmless throughout the whole of his life and conversation. 2c2.

He submitted to the penal part of the law; the law pronounces a curse on all those that do not perfectly observe its precepts; Christ being the Surety of his people, was made a curse for them; or endured the curse of the law in their stead, that he might redeem them from it (Gal. 3:10,13). The penal sanction of the law was death; it threatened with it, in case of sin or disobedience to it; the wages of sin is death; Christ therefore, as the substitute of his people became obedient to death, even the death of the cross, for them. 2c3.

All this he became and did, to fulfil the law in their room; and that the righteousness of it might be fulfilled in them, and so deliver them from the bondage, curse, and condemnation of it; that being, through Christ, dead to them, and they to that, that they might live unto God in a spiritual and evangelic manner. 3. Thirdly, Christ taking upon him the form of a servant, in human nature, and being made under the law, he was obedient to it, throughout the whole course of his life, to the time of his death; which is meant by that phrase, "Became obedient unto death"; that is, until death, as well as in it, and by submission to it.

And, 3a. There is the obedience of Christ to men; he was obedient to his earthly parents; he not only lived in a state of subjection to them in his childhood and youth, but continued his filial affection for them, and regard to them, particularly to his mother, when a grown man: his words to her in John 2:4 do not express irreverence towards her; nor did she so understand them, showing no resentment at them; but the contrary: nor do those in Matthew 12:48,49 signify any disrespect to her, nor want of affection to her; but his great affection for his spiritual relations: and that he retained his filial duty and regard to her to the last, appears by his bequeathing her to the care of one of his disciples (John 19:27).

Christ also yielded obedience to civil magistrates, as before observed, by paying the tribute money; hence in prophecy he is called, the Servant of rulers (Isa. 49:7). But, 3b. There is the obedience of Christ to God; for his Servant he was; and it was his law he was made under; and to which he yielded obedience; and is that obedience by which his people are made righteous; though there are many things in which Christ was obedient to God, which do not come into the account of his obedience for the justification of men.

As, 3b1. The miraculous actions which were performed by him: these were necessary to be done, for they were predicted of him, and were expected from him; hence the Jews said, "When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?" (John 7:31; Isa. 35:5,6). And these were done to prove his proper Deity, that he was truly God; that he was in the Father, and the Father in him; that is, that he was of the same nature with him, and equal to him; for the truth of which he appeals to those works of his (John 10:38 14:11).

These were also proofs of his being the true Messiah; and were given by him as evidences of it to the two disciples John sent to him, to know whether he was the Messiah expected or not (Matthew 11:3-5). Now these were done in obedience to his Father; he gave him those works to finish, and because they were done by his direction, and in his name, and by his authority, they are called the works of his Father (John 5:36; 10:25,37). And yet these are no part of that obedience by which men are made righteous; these were done to answer the above ends; and they are recorded, that we might believe in the Son of God, and in his righteousness; but, as Dr.

Goodwin observes [Works, vol. 3. part 3. p. 336.], they are not ingredients in that righteousness in which we believe. Nor, 3b2. His obedience in the ministration of the gospel: he had from God his mission and commission to preach the gospel; he was qualified for it as man, through the unction of the Holy Spirit; he was sent of God to preach to this and the other city; to these and the other people: he became the minister of the circumcision, or a minister to the circumcised Jews; both for the truth and faithfulness of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers; and in obedience to the will of God, who gave him a commandment what he should say, and what he should speak; and accordingly he said and spoke what was delivered to him; not his own doctrine, but his Father's, in which he sought, not his own, but his glory; and so showed himself to be true, and no unrighteousness in him (Rom. 15:8; John 8:28; 12:49,50; 7:16-18).

But now it was not his faithful execution of this his prophetic office, nor of the whole of his office as Mediator, which is the obedience or righteousness by which a sinner is justified; for though it is the righteousness of the Mediator; yet not the fidelity and righteousness he exercised in the execution of his office, is that by which men are justified. Nor, 3b3. His obedience to the ceremonial law, which he was under, as has been shown; and to which he yielded obedience; of which many instances have been given; but this is no part of our justifying righteousness; for the greater number of those that are made righteous by Christ's obedience, were never under this law; and so under no obligation to yield obedience to it; nor their surety for them.

But, 3b4. It is Christ's obedience to the moral law, which he was under, and to which he was obedient throughout his life, unto death; and is what all men are subject, and ought to be obedient to; and for lack of which obedience, Christ has yielded a perfect one, in the room and stead of his people; concerning which may be observed, his qualifications and capacity for it, his actual performance of it, and the excellency of his obedience, whereby it appears to have answered the end and design of it. 3b4a.

First, The qualifications and capacity of Christ to yield perfect obedience to the law. 3b4a1. His assumption of human nature, which was necessary to his obedience: as God he could not obey; he therefore took upon him a nature in which he could be subject to God, and yield obedience to him; and which was fit and proper to be done in that nature in which disobedience had been committed. 3b4a2. He was made under the law, for this purpose; which has been particularly explained and enlarged on. 3b4a3.

He had a pure and holy nature, quite conformable to the pure, holy, and righteous law of God; clear of all irregular affections, desires, motions, or lusts; is called, "the holy Thing", said to be "without spot or blemish", harmless and undefiled; entirely free from both original and actual transgression, and so fit for pure and perfect obedience to be performed in it. 3b4a4. Was possessed of a power of free will to that which is holy, just, and good, agreeable to the law of God.

In the state of innocence the will of man was free to that which is good only: in man fallen, his will is only free to that which is evil: in a man regenerate, there being two principles in him, there is a will to that which is good, and a will to that which is evil; so that he cannot do oftentimes what he would: but the human will of Christ was entirely free to that which is good; and as he had a will and power to do, so he always did the things which pleased his Father. 3b4a5.

He had a natural love to righteousness, and an hatred of sin (Ps. 45:7), and from this principle flowed an entire conformity to the law, throughout the whole of his life, and all the actions of it. 3b4b. Secondly, His actual performance of it; for as he came to fulfil it, he has fulfilled it; and is become the end of it, for

righteousness, to everyone that believes. The moral law consists of two tables; and is reduced, by Christ, to two points, love to God, and love to our neighbour; and both have been exactly observed and obeyed by Christ. 3b4b1.

The first table of the law; which includes, 3b4b1a. Love to God; "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart", &c. (Matthew 22:37,38) and which was never obeyed and fulfilled to such perfection and purity as by Christ; and which he has fully shown by his regard to the whole will of his Father, to all his commands, even to the laying down of his life for men; and therefore voluntarily went forth to meet the prince of this world in the garden, and deliver up himself into the hands of his emissaries, in order to suffer and die, according to his Father's will; hence he said, "That the world may know that I love the Father---Arise, let us go hence" (John 14:31). 3b4b1b.

Faith and trust in God; for to believe God, and to believe in him, is to have him before us, as the law requires: Christ very early exercised faith and hope on him as his God; even when he was upon his mother's breasts; and when in the midst of his enemies, and in suffering circumstances, he expressed the strongest degree of confidence in him; "The Lord God will help me, therefore I shall not be ashamed" (Ps. 22:9,10; Isa. 50:7-9). 3b4b1c. The whole worship of God; not only internal, which lies in the exercise of faith, hope, love, &c. just observed; but external, as prayer and praise; both which Christ was often in the exercise of (Luke 6:12; 10:21), and who not only directed to the worship and service of God, and of him only; but set an example by his constant attendance on public worship on sabbath days; and he showed his regard to it, by inveighing against all innovations in it, the doctrines, traditions, and commandments of men, as vain and superstitious; and by resenting every degree of profanation, even of the place of public worship (Matthew 4:10; 13:54; 15:3,6,9; 21:12,13). 3b4b1d.

Honour and reverence of the name of God; and though Christ himself was dishonored by men, he was careful to honour his God and Father, and not take his name in vain; "I honour my Father", says he, "and ye dishonor me". With what reverence does he address him in his prayer; saying, "Holy Father, and righteous Father?" (see John 8:49; 17:11,25). 3b4b1e. Sanctification of the sabbath; for though Christ was charged with breaking it, by doing acts of mercy on it; which he vindicated, and so cleared himself from the aspersion of his enemies; yet he was constant in the observation of it for religious service; it was his constant custom to go to the synagogue on sabbath days, and there either hear or read the scriptures, and expound them (Luke 4:16,31). 3b4b2.

The second table of the law; which includes, 3b4b2a. Honoring of parents, and obedience to them; the first commandment with promise, and the first in this table; and which, how it was observed by Christ, both in youth and manhood, has been remarked already; (see Luke 2:51), and in which he was a pattern to others of filial obedience. 3b4b2b. Love to our neighbour as one's self, and which is the second commandment, and like to the first (Matthew 22:39). And this was never fulfilled by any as by Christ; who has shown the greatest love, pity, and compassion, both to the bodies and souls of men: greater love hath no man, than what he has expressed to men, by suffering and dying for them, and working out their salvation (John 15:13). 3b4b2c.

Doing all good to men the law requires: and no injury to the persons and properties of men, which that forbids; and which Christ punctually observed: he went about continually from place to place, doing good to the bodies of men, by healing all manner of diseases; and to the souls of men, by preaching wholesome doctrine to them: nor did he ever, in one single instance, do any injury to the person of any man, by striking, smiting, or killing; nor to the property any one; he did "no violence", committed no act of rapine or

robbery, or took away any man's substance by fraud or force (Acts 10:38; Isa. 53:9). 3b4b2d.

As all malice, impurity, and evil concupiscence, are forbidden in this table of the law; none of these appeared in Christ; no, not the least shadow of them; no malice prepense, nor hatred of any man's person; no unchaste desires, looks, words, and actions; no evil covetousness, or lust after what is another's; nor after any worldly riches and grandeur: so that the law, in both its tables, was precisely obeyed by him. 3b4c. Thirdly, The obedience which Christ yielded to the law, has these peculiar excellencies in it. 3b4c1.

It was voluntary; he freely offered himself to become man, to be made under the law, and yield obedience to it; or, in other words, to do the will of God; saying, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God!" and when he was come, it was meat and drink; or, he took as much delight and pleasure in doing the will and work of God, and went about it as willingly and as cheerfully, as a man does in eating and drinking (Heb 10:7; John 4:34). 3b4c2. It is perfect and complete; there is no command but what Christ inviolably kept; no one, in anyone instance, was broken by him; "He did no sin": whatever was commanded, he did; and whatever was forbidden, he avoided: hence those that are justified by his obedience and righteousness, are all fair, without spot, perfectly comely through his comeliness put upon them. 3b4c3.

It excels the obedience of men and angels; not only the obedience and righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, who pretended to a strict observance of the law, but of the most truly righteous persons; for "there is not a just man upon earth, that does good and sinneth not" (Eccl. 7:20). But Christ did all that was good, without sin: the obedience and holiness of angels is chargeable with folly, in comparison of the purity and holiness of God: but the obedience and righteousness of Christ is without any blemish, weakness, or imperfection. 3b4c4.

It was wrought out in the room and stead of his people; he obeyed the law, and satisfied it in all its demands, that the righteousness of it might be fulfilled in them, or for them, in him, as their head and representative; hence he, being the end of the law for righteousness unto them, it is unto them, and comes upon them. 3b4c5. It is the measure and matter of the justification of them that believe in him; "By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19), that is, by the imputation of this obedience, or righteousness, unto them; (see 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21). 3b4c6.

It is an obedience well pleasing in the sight of God; because voluntary, perfect, superior excellency, performed in the room and stead of his people, and by which they are justified. God is well pleased with his Son, and with his people, considered in him; and with his righteousness and obedience imputed to them; because by it the law is magnified and made honorable; Christ always did the things which pleased his Father; his obedience, in all the parts of it, is acceptable to him; and so are his people on account of it, in whose room and stead it was performed; this is what is commonly called the active obedience of Christ, which he performed in life, agreeable to the precepts of the law.

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