



# REFORMED

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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:  
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;  
he shall set me up upon a rock.*

—Psalm 27:5

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Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

—Exodus 20:7

## Third Commandment

**T**he name of God.

How excellent it is!

God's people know the name of God (Ps. 9:10). In the name of God they set up their banners (20:5). Jesus declares the name of God unto his brethren as he sings praise in the midst of the church (22:22; Heb. 2:12). For his own name's sake, God pardons his people, leads his people, and guides his people (Ps. 25:11; 31:3). Through the name of God we push down our enemies and tread them under that rise up against us (44:5). In the name of God we boast all the day long and praise God's name forever (v. 8). The foolish people blaspheme the name of God, but Jesus and his church sing praise to God's name forever (74:18; 61:8). That God's name is near his wondrous works declare (75:1). The north and the south and Tabor and Hermon rejoice in God's name (89:12). It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord and to sing praises unto the name of the Most High (92:1). Not unto us but unto God's name give glory, for his mercy and for his truth's sake (115:1). The name of God endureth forever (135:13).

“O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!” (Ps. 8:1).

God's name is not like man's names. Man's names are only handles. Man's names are only pointers. Man's names do not express the essence of a thing. Man's names do not reveal the thing that is being named for what that thing really is. Man calls the tree a tree; but he could just as well have called the tree by any other sound, for the name *tree* does not reveal the

essence and the truth of the tree. Man names his son after considering and discarding many choices; but he could just as well have settled on any of the choices, for the name that he chooses does not reveal the essence and the truth of his son. Man calls things, names things, christens things; but man's names are smoke and shadow; man's names are empty and vain.

But God's name is excellent! For God's name is no empty shadow. Rather, God's name is a revelation. God's name expresses the truth of God in his very being. God's name declares and makes known the truth of who God truly is. God is God. God is Almighty. God is I AM. God is Lord. God is the Holy One of Israel. God is Father.

God is his name! And therefore, when one knows God's name, one knows God. What a privilege for God's people to know the name of the Lord and thus to know their God.

And when one touches God's name, one touches God. How wicked, then, is blasphemy. What depth of iniquity it is to curse God's name or to connive at another's cursing of God's name. What monstrous rebellion it is to take the excellent name of God and to change it into an empty interjection by which to proclaim man's surprise, man's fear, man's joy, man's anger. And what awful sin for us to use God's name with anything less than wholehearted praise and honor.

What shall be done for us blasphemers? Behold Jesus Christ, who died to cover our sin of blasphemy. And behold Jesus Christ, who perfectly loved God's name and used God's name in

no other way than to honor God, which obedience of our Lord is counted as ours. “I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee” (Ps. 22:22).

What shall be our thankful response? This: “Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain.”

—AL

## THE SCRIVENER

**R**emnant Reformed Church’s Reformation Day lecture is reprinted here with the prayer that God will use it for the encouragement and blessing of his people, in whose place Christ perfectly obeyed God’s holy law.

### Opening Remarks—Dewey Engelsma

Good evening, everyone. Welcome to our annual Reformation Day lecture.<sup>1</sup> This is our second such lecture. Our first one was held last year on the topic of the law-gospel distinction,<sup>2</sup> and we are excited about the topic tonight, on Christ’s active obedience. I would like to begin by reading Psalm 15 and then opening in prayer.

[Reading of Psalm 15]

Our Father which art in heaven, we come to thee in this evening hour, and we give thee thanks that thou hast brought us here this evening to be instructed in a truth of thy word, a truth that is most precious unto us, for it has to do with our savior, Jesus Christ. We thank thee for drawing us here, O Lord, and giving us to study a portion of thy word and to hear that word expounded to us. For we know that according to our flesh, the things of this world and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life and many things would command our attention and our affection. But thou hast in thy mercy drawn us unto thee so that we would know something of the kingdom of heaven.

We have heard two questions posed to us, O Lord, in this evening hour, in the passage that we read: who shall abide in thy tabernacle, and who shall dwell in thy holy hill? And thou hast

shown us in thy word who thou art, for that tabernacle and that dwelling place is not the dwelling place of this man or that man, but it is the dwelling place of Jehovah God. And thou hast revealed thyself in thy word, that thou art he who dwells in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen, neither can see, and before whom no iniquity can stand and who cannot look upon iniquity. And we hear the question, who shall approach into thy tabernacle and come into thy holy hill? and we are broken, for we do not have righteousness in ourselves. Whatever righteousness we find, our confession is that it is filthy rags. We thank thee, O Lord, for the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ; for when we read of the man who shall approach and shall come, when we read of righteousness and he that worketh and maketh righteousness, we know there is one: thy Son, Jesus Christ. And we thank thee, O Lord, for this gospel, so that our confession is and can be that we may come into thy holy hill, and we may come into thy tabernacle for the sake of Jesus Christ.

We pray that thou will be with us in this evening hour as we are instructed in this truth. We pray that thou will take this word, a word that is lightly set by in the world. And we know that truth, as the world rushes toward its end, shall be increasingly despised; and many shall turn away from a love for that truth. And we confess here too, O Lord, that we would be those who would turn away from the fountain of living waters and hew out for ourselves cisterns that can hold no water. And so we pray, preserve us.

<sup>1</sup> This is a copyedited transcript of a speech given October 31, 2024, at Remnant Reformed Church. The speech can be found at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojvSpbUX\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojvSpbUX_Q).

<sup>2</sup> See Andrew Lanning, “The Good Law and the Glorious Gospel,” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 32 (November 18, 2024): 9–23.

We are the sinners; we are the publicans; and we pray, O Lord, that thou will visit us in thy mercy.

Be with Reverend Lanning as he delivers the lecture this evening. We pray that thy Spirit might dwell upon him that he might draw out of thy treasure house, out of thy word, things old and new; that, having tasted of the firstfruits of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, he might come with arms laden, sharing with the flock, sharing with thy people—whether in this place or watching from afar—the glorious news of the active obedience of Jesus Christ, which obedience is imputed and given unto us as our own.

We ask, O Lord, for the pardon of our sins. Wash them away in the blood of thy Son, Jesus Christ. Cast them into the depths of the sea, and remember them no more. And all this we pray not because we are worthy but for Jesus Christ's sake, who alone is worthy. Amen.

[Comments on the night's agenda]

Our speaker, Reverend Lanning, is the pastor of Remnant Reformed Church. And we are thankful for Reverend Lanning. I could give his biographical information, but it probably gets to the heart of the matter to describe him as a man who knows nothing among us save Jesus Christ and him crucified. And we are thankful for that.

## The Active Obedience of Christ

### Introduction

It is appropriate that we have our Reformation Day celebration on a windy evening because one of the great episodes in the Reformation was Martin Luther's getting caught in a thunderstorm. The year was 1505, so this was several years yet before the Reformation would begin; and Martin Luther, as a young man, was preparing to be a lawyer. Crossing a field one evening, he was caught in a torrential downpour with mighty winds and tremendous crashing thunder; and at the time he was a very good Roman Catholic, and so he cried out to Saint Anne to save him and promised Saint Anne that he would become a monk if she would let him live. And the life of a monk was far different than the life of a lawyer that he had been planning on. Not Saint Anne but the Lord delivered him from the thunderstorm that night, and Luther became a monk.

After Luther had studied for some time, he was given the assignment of lecturing through the psalms. When he came to Psalm 22, he was struck because Psalm 22 begins, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Luther himself often felt forsaken. He knew his own sins: he was a spiritually sensitive man who knew the contours and the nooks and crannies of all his sins and often felt forsaken of God because of those sins and could find no relief in all of the

works that he would perform to try to alleviate his conscience. But as he pondered Psalm 22:1, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" he realized that Christ had been forsaken instead of Luther, so that the doctrine of Christ as our substitute was driven home to him. That is appropriate for tonight because when we talk about the active obedience of Christ, the substitution of Christ for us is at the heart of it. And God through those lectures on the psalms really struck the first blow of the Reformation in Luther's heart, so that from then on Luther would look for and find Christ in all of the scriptures and especially Christ as our substitute.

Today, October 31, is what we call Reformation Day. In the Middle Ages the Roman Catholic Church held a public holiday called All Saints' Day on November 1. It was a day that people would go to church; and so Luther, on All Hallows' (Saints') Eve, went to the church in Wittenberg and posted to the church door his ninety-five theses. Luther did not have everything worked out correctly in those ninety-five theses; he was still defending the pope at that point, and he was still defending some kind of practice of selling indulgences; but those ninety-five theses took a totally different view of salvation than the Roman Catholic Church did. The view that those ninety-five theses took was

a spiritual view, so that instead of the carnal, materialistic view of buying and selling salvation, Luther in those ninety-five theses showed that salvation was a spiritual matter. That was revolutionary. That was not the way the church was thinking; that was not the way the priests were teaching. Those ninety-five theses were published and republished and sent throughout all of Europe, and we mark the date of the beginning of the Great Reformation as October 31, 1517. And so now, on October 31, 2024, we commemorate the Reformation of God's church.

Our topic tonight is the active obedience of Christ. Rome taught that each individual, each person, must obey for himself for his salvation. So you stand before the law all by yourself, and the person next to you stands before the law all by himself; and how well you do before that law will determine how many merits you receive and thus how good you are in God's sight. The truth that was restored at the time of the Reformation, the truth of the gospel, is that Jesus stands before that law instead of us. Jesus stands before its requirements, and Jesus' obedience to that law is counted as the obedience of his people, so that our righteousness before God is not what we have done but is entirely what someone else has done for us. And we call what Jesus has done for us the *active obedience* of Christ.

Martin Luther taught this doctrine from very early on in the Reformation, calling Christ's merits "Christ's obedience to the law for me."<sup>3</sup> It is that "*for me*" that was so revolutionary and is so comforting to the people of God. Christ obeyed; and Christ, therefore, is my righteousness before God.

So tonight we take on this topic of the active obedience of Christ. I would like to develop that in four points. First, what is the active obedience of Christ? Second, how is the active obedience of Christ possible? Third, a defense of the active obedience of Christ. And fourth, the importance of the active obedience of Christ.

## What Is the Active Obedience of Christ?

The active obedience of Christ is a wonderful, glorious, comforting truth of the gospel. The term, however, *active obedience of Christ*, is unsatisfactory. By this point in history we are stuck with this term. At the end of this point I'd like to propose a different term, understanding that that term is not going to catch on so that we're going to change the terminology; but at least that term will help us understand what is the heart and the meaning of the active obedience of Christ.

The problem with the term *active obedience of Christ* is, first of all, that that term does not capture exactly what we are talking about. It is not adequate to capture the reality of Christ's substitutionary obedience. *Substitution* is the issue: Jesus' obeying *for me*, Jesus' obeying instead of me. *Active obedience of Christ* doesn't capture that idea of substitution.

Another reason that the term is not satisfactory is that it is often confusing, especially when you pair *active obedience of Christ* with *passive obedience of Christ*. Those are the two parts of Christ's obedience: active and passive. But we usually use those terms *active* and *passive* today to describe whether I'm doing something actively—that's *active*—or whether something is being done to me—that's *passive*. With Christ's obedience we are not talking about something Christ did actively and something that was merely done to him, and so these terms can become confusing. So I am going to propose another term.

But in the meantime we want to know what is meant by this term *active obedience of Christ*. The strength of the term is that it teaches us that we are dealing with Jesus' obedience. It is the *active obedience* of Christ. The term brings out that Jesus Christ obeyed.

Scripture is full of the teaching that Jesus obeyed God. Jesus Christ, as come in our flesh, was the servant of Jehovah; and as the servant of Jehovah, he obeyed. In Isaiah 42:1 God calls Jesus "my servant" and says to us, "Behold my

<sup>3</sup> As quoted in R. Scott Clark, "Do This and Live: Christ's Active Obedience as the Ground of Justification," in R. Scott Clark, ed., *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry: Essays by the Faculty of Westminster Seminary California* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2007), 230–31.

servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth.” That description of Jesus as the servant of God is found throughout the Old Testament prophets.

We also read of Jesus’ obedience often in his own ministry. Jesus was always preaching obedience, and the obedience he preached was his own obedience. John 4:34: “Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” That is Jesus’ obedience. He considered it like food. He desired it like one desires food. Or again, John 5:17: “Jesus answered them, My father worketh hitherto, and I work.” There Jesus indicated that the work that he did was on behalf of his Father. John 5:36: “I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.” Jesus held up his works, works that the Father had given him to do. That was Jesus’ obedience to God. Or again, John 6:38: “For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.” Again, Jesus’ obedience to God. John 17:4: “I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.” Throughout Jesus’ ministry he constantly referred to his working, to his obeying. Jesus was obedient to God.

When the apostles summarized the whole ministry of Jesus, they also summarized that ministry as Jesus’ obedience. Philippians 2:5–8, for example:

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, *and became obedient* unto death, even the death of the cross.

Here is the apostle Paul’s summary of the whole life and ministry of Jesus Christ: he was a servant, and he was obedient even to the death of the cross.

What we are talking about, then, is Jesus’ obedience.

Now, we can distinguish Jesus’ obedience as his active obedience, on the one hand, and his passive obedience, on the other hand. When we speak of Jesus’ *passive obedience*, we mean Jesus’ suffering God’s wrath against the sins of his elect people. This is where the terminology becomes confusing because when Jesus suffered God’s wrath against our sins, he was very active. That was not merely something done to him; that was something that he took hold of. That was something that he embraced, so that Jesus says about his suffering and his paying for our sins that he laid down his life, and no man took it from him (John 10:18). We read in Psalm 22:2 that in Jesus’ suffering the wrath of God against our sin, he cried unto God. Jesus was actively suffering God’s wrath against our sin. So the term *passive obedience* is confusing. The reason that that term is used is the same reason we use the term *passion* for Jesus’ Passion Week. The root of *passion* and *passive* is *suffering*. Jesus’ Passion Week was his week of suffering; Jesus’ passive obedience was his suffering the wrath of God against our sins.

So that is passive obedience. On the other hand is Jesus’ active obedience. Jesus’ *active obedience* was Jesus’ doing all the things that the law required him to do. Whereas his passive obedience was his suffering God’s wrath against our sins, Jesus’ active obedience was his working righteousness. It was his hearing the law, which says, “Love me”; and Jesus loved God. It was his hearing God’s commandment “Thou shalt not have any other gods”; and Jesus had no other gods. This was Jesus’ *active obedience*, as we use that term: it was his working righteousness; it was his obeying the things that God said must be done or must not be done.

So when we distinguish between active and passive obedience, we are simply talking about Jesus’ suffering in our place all the penalty for our sin (passive obedience) and Jesus’ actually working and obeying and doing the things that the law required (active obedience).

When we come, then, to Jesus' active obedience, we can talk about certain characteristics or aspects of that active obedience. First, Jesus' active obedience was entire. That is, Jesus stood before the entire law. There was no commandment of the law that did not apply to him. The law to have no other gods applied to him. The law to make no graven image applied to him. The law not to take God's name in vain applied to him. You can go through all ten commandments and see that the whole law applied to Jesus. And then when you broaden that out beyond what we call the moral law, or the ten commandments, and look at all of the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament—like which kinds of animals to sacrifice and how to eat and all the rest of the laws—all of those were fulfilled in Jesus Christ too, so that Jesus' obedience was an *entire* obedience to the *entire* law of God.

The second aspect of Jesus' active obedience is that he obeyed *strictly*, and he obeyed perfectly. The law of God, after all, is strict. The law of God is perfect. The law of God does not come to man and say to him, "Try hard. Try your best. Do the best that you can do. Do whatever is in you." But the law of God comes and says strictly, "You *must*. *Thou shalt*, and thou shalt not." Jesus' obedience corresponded to that strictness of the law of God. Jesus' obedience was a strict obedience. Jesus did what the law required, down to the depths of that law, so that Jesus not only obeyed the first commandment in the outward form—never making to himself an idol of Baal and bowing down to it—but Jesus also obeyed that law in his *heart*. Where the first commandment touches the *heart*, Jesus obeyed. Jesus' obedience was a strict, a perfect, obedience.

A third aspect of Jesus' obedience is that it was complete. That is, Jesus obeyed everything that there was to obey. There is no obedience left for the people of God in Christ to perform in order to be right with God. When Jesus said upon the cross, "It is finished," he did not only mean "The sins of my people are paid for," but he meant that all righteousness is finished. The evidence that that was what he meant was that

immediately he said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Jesus ascended into the hill of the Lord, because Jesus was the righteous worker. When Jesus said, "It is finished," he meant, "I have completed all the obedience that could ever be required of my people, and now I go to heaven. Now, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

Fourth, an aspect of Jesus' active obedience is that it is imputed. That is, it is counted to others—others who are in Jesus Christ but who did not themselves obey the law.

That takes us to the fifth aspect of Jesus' active obedience: it was substitutionary obedience. Jesus obeyed *for us*, *instead of us*, *in place of us*, as the *substitute* for us. As Martin Luther said, Christ's merits are "Christ's obedience to the law *for me*." And our Belgic Confession speaks in article 22 of Christ's merits and holy works, "which he has done *for us* and in our stead."

Here, when we come to this fifth aspect of Christ's active obedience, we come to the heart of it. This is what Jesus' active obedience is all about: substitution. The active obedience of Jesus doesn't mean anything apart from this idea of substitution. He was obeying not as a private individual, as if he stood alone before the law of God and obeyed everything that the law told him to do. But his obedience to the law of God was on behalf of others, for the sake of others, instead of others. Instead of all of God's people, Jesus Christ obeyed the law. The key to understanding Jesus' active obedience is this matter of substitution.

Substitution applies to both Jesus' passive obedience—that is, his suffering God's wrath—and to his active obedience. We talk about Jesus' *substitutionary atonement*. That is a better term for Jesus' passive obedience. What is Jesus' substitutionary atonement? It means that he stood under God's curse instead of us. We deserved it; we are the sinners. Jesus was not a sinner. We are the ones who violate God's law. We are the ones who should bear the curse. But Jesus took every one of our sins upon himself. God counted those sins to Jesus as his own, even though he didn't do them, and Jesus Christ suffered under



God's wrath instead of us. He was a substitute in our place.

The same concept of substitution applies to Jesus' active obedience. Not only did he suffer the curse of the law in our place, but he also did all of the obeying of the law in our place. The law said, "Do," and Jesus did, so that you never have to do in order to receive anything from God. The law said, "Don't," and Jesus didn't, so that you never have to abstain in order to obtain anything from God. Jesus was the substitute for his people under that law and obeyed perfectly, strictly, entirely, completely under that law in place of us. And the result of this is that Jesus is our righteousness, both in his passive obedience and his active obedience, in his being a substitutionary atonement and in his substituting his active obedience. Jesus is our righteousness. When the question comes to you, "How can you be right before God?" the answer is, "Jesus. Jesus and only Jesus. He is my righteousness." That is what scripture calls him too: "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jer. 23:6). That is what scripture says about him in I Corinthians 1:30: he is *made* righteousness unto us. Jesus Christ suffered the law's curse and obeyed the law's requirements *in our place*, as our substitute, so that we are righteous in him.

Scripture is full of this idea of substitution. It is everywhere. When you start to see the idea of substitution, you find it on every page. You find it way at the beginning, after the fall of Adam and Eve into sin. God gave the first promise, that glorious declaration of the gospel in Genesis 3:15, when he said, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." There is substitution there. The seed of the woman would do something instead of the woman and instead of Adam.

When you look at the Old Testament ceremony of the scapegoat, you see substitution. The priest was required to lay his hand on the animal that was being sacrificed and on another animal that would be sent into the wilderness, and that laying on of the hand indicated substitution.

"This lamb is going to die instead of us. And this goat is going to go out into the wilderness, bearing all our sins away." This idea of substitution was found throughout the sacrifices, so that every day when the sacrifices were made, substitution was symbolized by the putting on of the hand.

You find this idea of substitution in the types in scripture: David and the high priest—David, who stood before God on behalf of the people, and the high priest, who went into the temple on behalf of the people. *On behalf of* is substitution. The high priest represented Christ, who takes us into God's presence. Throughout scripture this idea of substitution is found, so that when you come to I Corinthians 1:30 and see that Jesus is made unto us righteousness, then the lightbulb goes on. Of course. Of course Jesus is made unto us righteousness because he is our substitute in our place.

And so what term might we use—though that's not the most important thing—to describe this active obedience of Christ? What about the term *substitutionary obedience*? We already have a term like that for Jesus' passive obedience: that is his *substitutionary atonement*. That term takes hold of this substitution: Jesus for me, Jesus instead of me. Why not use that same kind of term for Jesus' active obedience? His *substitutionary obedience*, so that it sticks in our minds and in our hearts that Jesus obeyed God's law entirely in my place and for me.

Of course, we don't expect that term to catch on. *Active obedience* and *passive obedience* are too entrenched. But at least in our own minds we can use those terms in order to have it cemented that substitution is at the heart of Christ's obedience.

### How Is Christ's Active Obedience Possible?

Jesus' substitutionary obedience is possible because he is our head, because he is our mediator. This is the truth that is taught in Isaiah 42, for example, where Jesus is called God's "*elect*" (v. 1). Jesus is *the* elect. We are not the first elect; Jesus is the elect. And we are chosen, according to the apostle in Ephesians 1:4, *in him*. In that idea of

Jesus as the elect and our being chosen in him, we have the idea of headship and the idea of representation, so that Jesus is the one who represents us in all things.

Not that long ago in Remnant Reformed Church we saw how often the preposition *in* shows up in Ephesians, so that from the first chapter to the last we are *in* Christ, *in* him, *in* the beloved—in, in, in. That preposition *in* indicates the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ. Headship is a matter of representation. That means that what the head does counts for the body. When Jesus obeyed the law of God, that counts for you. That counts for God's people. Though you and I will never obey perfectly in this life, all of Jesus' obedience counts for you instead of your own obedience. That means that when you stand before Jehovah God, whose eyes burn like lamps and whose eyes are holy, and he looks at you and looks right through you into the deepest recesses of your soul and says about you as he is looking through you, "You are righteous; I find no evil thing in you; I find you to have obeyed perfectly," what God is saying is about the righteousness of Christ. That is what he is seeing. That is what he looks at. He is not looking at your and my imperfect obedience. He is not looking at our sins. He is looking at Jesus Christ, at Jesus' perfect obedience, and says about you because of what Jesus did, "I find no fault in you. You are innocent. You are not guilty." Jehovah God declares us righteous because of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done. We call that matter of God's counting us righteous with Christ's righteousness *imputation*. God imputes, he reckons, he counts what is Christ's as ours. So sings the psalmist: "Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth [counteth, reckoneth] not iniquity" (Ps. 32:2).

And the child of God is united to Jesus Christ as his head by faith. Lord's Day 7, Q&A 20: "those who are ingrafted into him...by a true faith," which figure of grafting the Heidelberg Catechism gets from Romans 11.

How is Christ's active obedience, Christ's substitutionary obedience, possible? Because of Christ's headship and our union to him by faith.

## A Defense of Christ's Active Obedience

Christ's active obedience, or Christ's substitutionary obedience, is not the majority opinion in the church world today. There are many—in fact, most—who oppose the doctrine of Jesus' obedience being counted, imputed, as our obedience. There are some who do this very explicitly. They reject out of hand any teaching that Christ obeyed instead of me. There are others who do it implicitly, so that by their doctrine of salvation, they imply that Jesus did not obey completely or fully and that some obedience of mine is left in order for me to obtain some blessing.

Rome, in the time of the Reformation and still today, rejects the active obedience of Christ by teaching that man is right with God by his own meritorious works. Yes, Rome will speak about grace. Rome says that God gets the whole process of salvation started by grace; God gives grace in baptism, and God gives grace in the mass, so that when somebody receives that baptism or receives the bread upon his tongue, there is grace. That grace is given unto him, and that gives him a little bit of strength to do something good. And that little bit of good that he does God takes hold of, and God assigns merit to it. God says, "I am going to give you something because you paid me this bit of good, this good work," so that a man's righteousness, a man's merit before God, is what that *man* has done. Rome rejects the active obedience of Christ, or the substitutionary obedience of Christ, and says, "You'd better obey for your righteousness."

Another major rejection of the active obedience of Christ is by the dispensationalists. Dispensationalism is the teaching that God has two entirely different kinds of people, two entirely different kingdoms. One kind of people are Jews; the other kind of people are Gentiles, or "the church." God works salvation among the Jews—those who can trace their physical descent to Abraham—one way. He works that in a physical, earthly way, so that the hope of the Jews, according to the dispensationalists, is that the city of Jerusalem be restored, that the temple be rebuilt, that the whole system of bloody sacrifices be

reinstated. God has this people, the Jews, that is entirely different from the New Testament people, from the church. On the other hand, the church, made up of Gentiles, those who are not Jews, is really a parenthesis in God's work. And *parenthesis* is their word, not my description of it. The Gentiles are a parenthesis in God's work. His main work is with the Jews in the city of Jerusalem; but God for this dispensation, for this time, gathers his church by faith.

Dispensationalism rejects the active obedience of Christ, or the substitutionary obedience of Christ. John Nelson Darby, who is considered the father of modern dispensationalism, had this to say about Christ's active obedience: "I simply, very openly, deny his [a critic of Darby's] doctrine of the justifying vicariousness of Christ's life as under the law."<sup>4</sup> "Justifying vicariousness" is Darby's term for substitution. *Vicarious* means *substitution*. Darby explicitly and openly rejected the teaching that what Christ did under the law, what Christ did as the servant of God, he did in place of his people. There is no vicariousness, no substitution, to what Christ did, according to Darby.

Another dispensationalist, by the name of Harry Ironside, had this to say: "Nowhere does Scripture say Christ's righteousness is imputed."<sup>5</sup> There, dealing with imputation, which is very closely related to substitution: Christ's righteousness is not imputed, not counted. What he did does not count for you, according to Harry Ironside.

A little closer to home is the rejection of Jesus' active obedience by the federal vision. The federal vision is a movement that has been powerful and popular in Reformed circles for the last twenty-five years or so. The teachings and the core of the federal vision have been around much longer than that. But in the year 2000, Norman Shepherd's publishing of the book *The Call of Grace* brought federal vision theology before the

consciousness of Reformed churches. The federal vision is an attempt to make all doctrine harmonize with a conditional covenant. That is why the theology is called what it is: *federal* means *covenant*. Those who teach the federal vision attempt to rewrite all doctrine so that it fits with a conditional covenant. That means that in justification, for example, justification is not by faith alone. That would be consistent with an unconditional covenant. But rather, justification is by faith *and works*, or, as they like to say, by an obedient faith, by a working faith, so that one is not justified until he has done his working.

One of the hallmarks of the federal vision is that it rejects the substitutionary obedience of Christ. The doctrine of the federal vision is that when Jesus obeyed, he was obeying only for himself. He was obeying so that he could be a righteous man before God, but Jesus' obedience is not imputed to me. It was not a substitute for my obedience.

One of the leaders of the federal vision in the past years has been a man by the name of Rich Lusk, and he had this to say: "This justification requires no transfer or imputation of anything. It does not force us to reify 'righteousness' into something that can be shuffled around in heavenly accounting books."<sup>6</sup> And again, similarly, "Our righteous status is not a matter of God doing mental tricks or shuffling righteousness around heavenly ledgers; it is a matter of our concrete, personal relationship with Christ himself."<sup>7</sup> Rich Lusk mocks the idea of substitutionary obedience by calling it a mental trick that God does or the shuffling around of heavenly ledgers. Lusk in these quotes shows he knows nothing of the idea of headship, that the child of God in the Lord Jesus Christ has everything that Christ has. That is not shuffling around ledgers. That is not a mental trick. That is a real union between Jesus Christ and his people, so that Christ's obedience really and truly counts as his people's obedience.

<sup>4</sup> As quoted in Patrick Abendroth, *The Active Obedience of Christ* (Omaha, NE: Pactum Publishing, 2024), 79.

<sup>5</sup> As quoted in Abendroth, *The Active Obedience of Christ*, 80.

<sup>6</sup> As quoted in Clark, "Do This and Live," 243.

<sup>7</sup> As quoted in David J. Engelsma, *Federal Vision: Heresy at the Root* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2012), 87.

The reason that the federal vision rejects the imputation of Christ's substitutionary obedience is so that the *believer's* obedience can have some standing, especially at the final judgment. The favorite doctrine of the federal vision is that, to quote Rich Lusk again, "Final justification is by faith and works together," and again, "In the final installment of our justification, there is a very real sense in which works will be the *decisive* factor."<sup>8</sup> There Lusk is teaching that the reason you cannot rely on Jesus' obeying in your place is that when you get to the final judgment, you have to have works to show God; and your final destination, your going to heaven or going to hell eternally, will depend mainly upon your working. So the federal vision must reject Jesus' active obedience.

The truth of the matter is that, for the child of God, when you stand in the final judgment and the question comes to you, "What did you do?" your answer will be, "Christ did it. Christ did it all. He obeyed all the law, and he suffered all its penalty against my sins. Christ is righteous, and therefore I am righteous."

The defense against all of this denial of the active obedience of Christ is the clear teaching of scripture that Jesus obeyed in our place as our head.

Therefore by the deeds of the law [that is, our doing the law] there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God *without the law* is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe. (Rom. 3:20–22)

There is a righteousness without the law, a righteousness that comes without my doing the law: the righteousness of Christ, which is the righteousness of God received by faith alone. Or again, Romans 5:19: "For as by one man's

disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." That obedience of one is the obedience of Jesus Christ. By his obedience you are righteous, though you did not obey. Scripture teaches the obedience of Christ in place of the child of God.

There is another attack on the obedience of Christ that is by implication. So far we have looked at explicit attacks; there is also an attack on Christ's substitutionary obedience by implication. This shows that it is possible to pay lip service to Christ's active obedience, or Christ's substitutionary obedience, while at the same time denying that active obedience. This attack comes when it is taught that God's people are required to do something in order to obtain blessing from God—that in order to have the experience of forgiveness of sins or in order to enjoy God's covenant fellowship or in order to be sure of one's justification, one must work. And until one does that work, one does not have assurance.

This, for example, would be the theology taught in the popular hymn "Trust and Obey." "Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey." Trust—faith—*and obey*—and only once that obedience is performed (along with faith) can one be happy in Jesus. That teaches that Christ's obedience isn't enough for my happiness in Jesus but that my obedience is yet required for my happiness in Jesus.

For another example, the Protestant Reformed Churches at their 2024 synod decided that it is not heresy—that is, it is right—to teach that a man's good works are not to be slighted in assuring that man of his justification.<sup>9</sup> If a man's good works are *not to be slighted* in assuring that man of his justification, then those works are important and useful and necessary for a man to have assurance of his justification. Whatever other explanation comes, that is the doctrine that the people will go home with: my good

<sup>8</sup> As quoted in Engelsma, *Federal Vision: Heresy at the Root*, 88; emphasis is Lusk's.

<sup>9</sup> Synod 2024 Committee 3 advice, II.D.

works are not to be slighted to assure me of justification. The meaning, then, is that Christ did not do enough good work in order for me to be sure of my justification. But don't you see that that is the whole point of Jesus' active obedience? That is the whole point of his substitution in our place. When the question comes, how can you be sure—*sure*—of your righteousness? then the answer is not, "Well, let me check my good works." No, your good works are out! The one thing that gives assurance of your righteousness is *Jesus*: his good works, everything that he has done. Jesus is our righteousness, not my works in any way, shape, or form.

This implied attack on Jesus' active obedience makes righteousness or assurance or peace or blessing or experience come by the law, come by my working, in flat contradiction of the apostle's teaching in Galatians 2:21 that righteousness does *not* come by the law. The law and your obeying of the law will never give you righteousness or peace. The obedience of Jesus does. And *if* righteousness comes by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. That is how serious the matter is.

The answer of the Reformed faith over against that implied attack on the substitutionary obedience of Christ is Belgic Confession 22, entitled "Faith in Jesus Christ." The whole article answers that attack, but we will highlight especially something from the second paragraph.

Therefore we justly say with Paul, that we are justified *by faith alone*, or by faith without works. However, to speak more clearly, we do not mean that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace *Christ our righteousness*. But Jesus Christ, imputing to us all *his* merits and *so many holy works* which he has done *for us and in our stead*, is our righteousness.

There is the active obedience of Christ—the holy works that Christ did for you and instead of you. Those are counted as yours, and that is your righteousness before God.

So also the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 23 on justification:

Q. 60. How art thou righteous before God?

A. Only by a true faith in Jesus Christ; so that, though my conscience accuse me that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and have kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil; notwithstanding, God, without any merit of mine, but only of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ; even so, as if I never had had nor committed any sin: yea, as if I had fully accomplished all that obedience which Christ has accomplished *for me*; inasmuch as I embrace such benefit with a believing heart.

The righteousness of the child of God is what Christ has done, his obedience received not by my working but by faith alone.

### The Importance of Christ's Active Obedience

First, the importance of Christ's active obedience is our real righteousness before God. Psalm 15, as Dewey read and as he prayed, speaks of abiding in God's tabernacle and dwelling in God's holy hill—going up to Mount Zion in the Old Testament as a picture of going up to heaven and living with the great God, the I AM THAT I AM. And who is that God? That God is the holy one. That God has no sin in him. That God hates sin. That God cannot look upon sin with any approval. Dwelling with that God, or abiding with him, means that you stand in his presence and live in his house with him.

How in the world is it possible that you and I, who are filthy in our sins, should live before Jehovah God?—because we have a problem. Our problem is that we do not obey. Even our best works, our righteousnesses, are filthy rags (Isa. 64:6). There is not one of our works that we can hold before God and say, "For this reason I can dwell with thee." And note well that, according to Psalm 15, the one who abides in God's tabernacle must be one who "walketh uprightly, and

worketh righteousness” (v. 2). That is, not only must he pay for any sins that he has committed, but he must also work righteousness. He must have righteous works to hold before God. He must be one who “speaketh the truth in his heart” (v. 2).

The solution to our problem is Jesus’ substitutionary obedience. “Who shall abide in thy tabernacle?” Who indeed? Jesus. Jesus walketh uprightly. Jesus worketh righteousness. Jesus speaketh the truth in his heart. The Lord Jesus Christ obeyed. He obeyed perfectly. He obeyed completely, so that Jesus may abide in God’s tabernacle. And because Jesus obeyed as your head, representing you, as a substitute for you, all Jesus’ righteous works are yours—not because you do them but because Jesus did them. And you may abide in God’s tabernacle for the sake of Jesus Christ, who obeyed in your place. Our obedience, which is our righteousness before God, is an alien obedience. It is outside of us. It is not from within us but comes entirely from outside of us. It is someone else’s. It is Jesus’ obedience, counted as ours.

The second importance of Christ’s active obedience is freedom from bondage under the law. Now we are talking about your conscience. Now we are talking about your peace in this life—not only dwelling with God in heaven *someday* but dwelling with God now, your peace and your experience of his fellowship now. Jesus’ active obedience means that you are free from bondage under the law.

Being under the law is a very serious matter. In Romans 6 Paul makes sure to teach us that we are *not* under the law but under grace (v. 14). And in Galatians 4 he makes sure to tell us that Christ was made of a woman, *made under the law* (v. 4). What does it mean to be under the law? Imagine the law as a great iron lid over our heads. Above the iron lid is heaven. Under the iron lid is earth. To be under the law means that in order to get what is on the other side of the law—heaven, salvation, blessing, peace, joy, experience, comfort—you have to go *through* the law. If you are under the law, the only way to heaven is through the law, which means that you have to keep it

when it says, “Thou shalt” and “Thou shalt not.” Jesus’ active obedience means that you are not under the law. You are free from bondage under the law. There is no iron lid between you and heaven. *Jesus* was made under the law. *He* had to go through it to get what is on the other side—salvation and blessing and peace—and he did. He obeyed that law absolutely perfectly. And because Jesus did that in our place, you are not under the law. You are under grace.

That means the law can only talk to you a certain way. To use a violent example, the law may not, as it were, come into your house with a gun and hold that gun to your head and say, “You’d better obey or else.” The law mayn’t do that. The law may not talk to you that way because Jesus already did the whole law. There is nothing left to obey for the peace and the joy of obedience. Jesus already did all the obedience. This is the good news of salvation. I am not under the law. How do I get those things on the other side—salvation and experience and assurance and comfort? Not through the law but through grace! I am under grace! There is not an iron lid between God and me, but there is only grace—which means I am not reaching up to take all of those things, but Jehovah God is reaching down to take hold of me by his grace and bring all of those things to me and bring me to all of those things through Jesus Christ. This is the glory of the active obedience of Christ: that I am free from bondage under the law.

God’s word, God’s gospel, says to me, “Stop looking at what you did. Look at what Christ did! There is your peace. There is your comfort.”

The third importance of Christ’s active obedience is that we are free to obey the law. This might be an unexpected significance of Jesus’ active obedience because Jesus already obeyed the law, and he did it in my place. But what Jesus’ obedience to the law in my place did was make me free to obey the law with a clear conscience.

What does the law require? The law requires perfect obedience at all times. And the law gives no second chances; the moment there is disobedience, there must be death. If ever anyone

would disobey the law, he would not be free to try to obey the law again. There is no second chance.

You can illustrate it this way: if there is a man—to use another extreme example—who steals his neighbor blind, robs all his neighbor's things, and the law comes to him and says, "You must go to jail," that man cannot say, "Oh, just give me another chance. This isn't who I really am. It was a moment of weakness. There are things going on in my life. Just give me a second chance. From now on I'm not going to steal my neighbor blind. It won't happen again, I promise." The law would say to him, "It's too late for that. You are not free to try again. You are not free to try to love your neighbor again. You have to go to jail." And if the crime is heinous enough—if there were murder with that robbery—then "you have to die." The law doesn't give second chances. And if even in our earthly system, where sometimes there are second chances, there is this strictness to the law, then how much more with the righteous God. There are no second chances with God. The moment one sins, the smallest sin, as we might count sin, requires death. And the man who sins may not say to God, "But give me a second chance. Now I'm really going to try. That's not the real me. You don't understand what I was going through. Now I'm going to do a better job." The law would say to that man, "It's too late for that. There are no second chances. You disobeyed the law." You wouldn't be free to try again; you would be dead.

But Jesus obeyed the law, and he obeyed the law perfectly, so that now you are free before God to obey that law as the rule of your gratitude—not to get anything but because you've already been given everything. The child of God, through the substitutionary obedience of Christ, has a free conscience to obey the law. The child of God, when he hears the law, cannot hear its threats. The law says, "Do this, and live"; the law says, "Disobey me, and you'll die"; but the child of God can't hear that threat because Christ

already fulfilled the law for him, already obeyed it in his place, so that now the child of God, when he hears the law, doesn't run away from it in terror. But the child of God runs to it. It is his joy. It's his delight. He loves that law of God because there is no threat in it for him anymore, Jesus Christ having obeyed the law perfectly. Obedience to the law is a privilege for the child of God. His conscience is freed, and he sees the law as the rule and the standard and the guide of his grateful life to Jehovah.

And then, fourth, the importance of the active obedience of Christ is God's justice and Christ's honor. We end with Jehovah God. Jehovah God is the God who gives the law, and Jehovah God is the God who gives Christ, the perfect obeyer of that law, so that God through Christ maintains his own justice. He maintains himself. God does not say to his people, "Never mind your sin. I'm going to pretend it never happened." If God would say, "Never mind," then God would deny himself—an impossible thing. He would deny his justice. But God maintains his justice through Jesus Christ and Christ's keeping of the law; and that is for the honor of Christ, the one who is the head, the one who is the mediator, the one who is the elect, the one in whom we are chosen, the one who has obeyed in our place. It is all for the honor and glory of Christ because in Jesus Christ God has made himself known. He has shown himself in Christ, so that, honoring Christ, Jehovah God is honored. That is the most important thing of all—not first of all that you and I are saved, although God has tied our salvation to that honor of Christ too. But the most important thing of all is that Christ be honored and that God be honored through him.

This is why God has revealed his righteousness without the works of the law but by the obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is why God has given Christ to do so many holy works for us and in our stead. For the sake of his own honor, God has given us Christ and his substitutionary obedience.

## Question & Answer Session

**W**e have some nice questions here. I believe that all of these questions are asked sincerely, so when there might be one or two that strike us a certain way, we will remember that they are asked sincerely and not laugh.

*Christ's active obedience is the fulfillment of the "covenant of works" that some teach. What is this covenant of works, and how do we answer this doctrine?*

This question brings up a major topic in the active obedience of Christ. The speech did not mention the covenant of works, so this question saves the speech from overlooking a major topic. The relationship between Christ's active obedience and the covenant could be an entire point in itself.

This question is deep; this question is difficult because this question requires a reorienting of the thinking that we might normally have. So I'll try to be brief in the response, with the plea that you be patient because there is so much more to this than we can develop right here and probably more work that we need to do on this question.

Those who do teach the active obedience of Christ today ground it in what they call the covenant of works. Remnant Reformed Church does not. We reject the teaching of the covenant of works. But among those who do try to uphold the active obedience of Christ, they see the covenant of works as the ground.

By *covenant of works* they mean God's relationship to Adam—the covenant between God and Adam, which, they say, was a conditional covenant. It was a deal. It was a bargain. God laid a deal on the table for Adam, and the deal was this: obey me, and I'll give you heaven. Disobey me, and I'll kill you; I'll give you hell. This is the deal, this is the condition, that God laid before Adam: obey or else.

Those who try to defend the active obedience of Christ by appealing to the covenant of works say that when Adam failed—he disobeyed—Christ stepped into Adam's place and kept the covenant of works that Adam failed to keep. The implication of that for the active obedience of Christ is that the active obedience of Christ is the fulfilling of a condition, that God's relationship with people is ultimately conditional—obey me, and get heaven; disobey me, and get hell—and that all Christ did was keep a condition.

The problem with this teaching is that it makes God's whole relationship with man to be conditional. That is God's only way of relating to man, through this deal that was laid on the table that Adam did not fulfill but that Christ did fulfill. That conditionalism, then, must run through the entire covenant. In fact, those who appeal to the covenant of works with Adam teach that even the covenant of grace—which is God's covenant with us in Christ—is conditional. It just has a new condition. For Adam the condition was *work*; *obey*. For the covenant of grace, the condition is *believe*. But they are both conditions upon which the covenant depends.

The reason that people try to defend the active obedience of Christ by appealing to the covenant of works is because Jesus did indeed *obey* and because that *obedience* is his righteousness and our righteousness in him. So they think they see a connection; they think they see a way that those fit together. And in fact, they become very adamant about it, that the *only* way to defend the active obedience of Christ is by appeal to the covenant of works.

We reject that covenant of works; instead, the dealings of God must be thought of along these lines: not in the sense of a condition but in the sense of God's dealing with his people through their head. Those who defend a covenant of works say that we have to think of God's relationship with man in terms of a deal, which really just means in terms of a condition. But the real way to think of God's relationship with man



is in terms of headship. Then we have Adam's representing the whole human race, and God deals with his whole creation through Adam. And we have Jesus Christ's representing his elect, and God deals with all his elect through Jesus Christ. And in neither one of those dealings are there conditions.

More has to be developed along those lines, but I believe that Herman Hoeksema gave us at least the bones of it in 1918 already with his articles in the *Banner* that were all about the fallen king and his kingdom, and the new king and his kingdom. Along the lines that Hoeksema laid out in those articles is the way to understand this matter of God's dealing with his people.

To summarize all of that, the covenant of works is not necessary to defend the active obedience of Christ because the active obedience of Christ is just substitutionary obedience. The headship of Christ is all you need to defend that active obedience. He is your head, and he obeyed in place of you.

**Then some questions that showed some active listening at the beginning. Was the storm really bad that Luther was caught in or just like a normal storm? Didn't Martin Luther do the experiment with a flying kite in a storm, with a key on the kite, and he got struck by lightning?**

So this person remembered that there is a story about a kite in a storm, but that was a different story. That was Benjamin Franklin. Martin Luther was on his way through a field and on the way through the field was caught in a terrible storm. And it was a really bad storm. He thought he was going to die. This was no small thing. In his terror, because he didn't know any better, he cried out, "Saint Anne, save me! I'll become a monk." God saved him, and he became a monk and was led to Psalm 22 and the idea of substitution.

**That leads to the next question from a similar sheet with questions on it: What is substitution?**

This is the main point for us to take home. What is *substitution*? *Substitution* is this: Jesus did it for you. Jesus did it for you. He did everything you need for you. He died for you, instead of you; and

he obeyed for you, instead of you. Jesus did it for you, instead of you. That is substitution. And the result is that you may go to heaven. The result is that you live with God. The result is that Jesus is our righteousness.

Maybe the easiest way to put it is this: when you sing Psalm 15, like we just did, Jesus is the one who may abide in God's tabernacle because Jesus worked righteousness. And because Jesus has already worked all that righteousness for you, you may dwell with God too.

**Since both have to do with our righteousness before God, how do we distinguish between Christ's substitutionary obedience and justification by faith alone?**

It is true that both Christ's substitutionary obedience and justification by faith alone have to do with our righteousness before God. The way we usually put it in a dogmatics formulation would be that Christ's active obedience is the *ground* of justification by faith alone. That is, it is the reason whereby God declares us righteous. Why are you righteous? Why do you measure up to God? Not because you did it but because Christ did it. So Christ's active obedience or substitutionary obedience is the ground of justification by faith alone.

We can go a little deeper than that though. Christ's active obedience is the *ground* of our being righteous, but remember what scripture says *Jesus is*. He himself is *made* righteousness, and he himself is our righteousness. There is eternal comfort in that truth. You can never get outside the righteousness of Christ. Your enemies can't take you outside of it; your sins cannot take you outside of it. Jesus Christ is our righteousness. He is our whole answer to God regarding all things that are required.

**Can one deny the active obedience of Christ and still believe in justification by faith alone?**

The question asks about those who "deny" justification by faith alone. It is not asking about a child of God who is new to the Reformed faith or about a child of God who is learning more about the Reformed faith. It is possible that

God's people don't know the term *active obedience* or know all the depths of that truth but who nevertheless know that Jesus did everything they need for their salvation. But the question is about someone who denies the active obedience of Christ. One who denies the active obedience of Christ does not believe justification by faith alone. One who says, "No, I absolutely reject that Jesus Christ obeyed in my place" or one who pushes aside some of that active obedience by carving out a place for man's obedience to obtain something with God—that one is denying justification by faith alone. The evidence of that is what Paul says to the Galatians. The Judaizers—a group of people in the Galatian churches of that day—said, "We believe Jesus. We believe his cross; we believe he died for our sins; we believe he is our savior. All we want is Jesus *and* some obedience of the believer, that Jesus *and* something the believer does is our righteousness." Paul rejects that. Paul rebukes that. Paul condemns that as another gospel—not the gospel but a perversion and corruption of the gospel. So one who denies the active obedience of Christ or tries to carve out some place for man alongside Christ's work is denying justification by faith alone. And justification by faith alone is the article of the standing or the falling of the church.

*When discussing how we view good works, is there a difference between saying, "God sees an elect person's good works as perfect through Christ's blood" and "Christ's righteousness is imputed to the elect person so that any good works are Christ's works"?*

Yes, there is a difference between those two. When we talk about Jesus' substitutionary obedience, we have no reference whatsoever to anything we ever did—not one single work of ours. And the righteousness that we have before God is not that he is looking at something of us—looking at our obedience, looking at our desire to obey. He is not looking at anything in us whatsoever. God's declaration that we are righteous has reference *only* to the work of Christ. That is the substitutionary obedience of

Christ. When it comes to *our* works—and God does give us a small beginning of new obedience; he gives us fruit; he gives us good works—he accepts those works not because we did them well but because those works are covered in the blood of Christ or, as the Belgic Confession says, "sanctified by his grace." So says article 24, "Man's Sanctification and Good Works": "These works, as they proceed from the good root of faith, are good and acceptable in the sight of God, forasmuch as they are all sanctified by his grace." What that means is that the reason you are right with God and the reason those works are right with God is because of Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone. Christ is the one who is our righteousness, wholly and entirely.

*What is the Reformed faith's defense against the charge that this teaching of substitutionary obedience makes one "careless and profane"?*

The answer is, it is impossible that this doctrine make anyone careless and profane. It is absolutely impossible. This doctrine will not make you careless to live a good life and to do good works; this doctrine and this doctrine *alone* will give you good works and will bear the fruit of good works. Your flesh is careless; my flesh is; our flesh is profane; but this doctrine does not make anyone careless and profane. The Reformed faith says that in these words in Belgic Confession article 24, on sanctification and good works: "Therefore it is so far from being true that this justifying faith makes men remiss in a pious and holy life, that on the contrary, without it they would never do anything out of love to God, but only out of self-love or fear of damnation."

And now imagine yourself before the bar of God's justice; and you hear that it is not your obedience but the obedience of Christ, freely given to you, that makes you right with God. What does that do to you? Does that make you say, "Oh good, now I can go sin and do whatever I please"? That is not what that doctrine does to you! The doctrine that your righteousness is Christ's makes you grateful, fills you with gratitude so that you overflow with it and desire to obey God's law. The gospel doesn't make men

remiss or careless; the gospel makes men thankful.

*Is there something wrong with saying that the cross of Jesus Christ is enough for our justification, so that we do not need more for our righteousness?*

No, there is nothing wrong with saying that. The cross of Jesus Christ is enough. We do not need more than the cross for our righteousness. But the idea, then, of the cross is that it is the epitome of all of Jesus' obedience. Remember what the apostle says about Jesus' obedience in Philippians 2, that Jesus became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. All of Jesus' suffering was active, not passive. We understand why we use that word *passive* for *passion*, *suffering*—but Jesus' suffering was active suffering. He drank the cup that God gave to him, and he drained it to its dregs. He laid down his life, and no man took it from him, for this commandment had he of his Father, that he lay down his life and take it up again (John 10:18). Jesus Christ was active in his suffering and his atoning, so that the cross can be seen as the pinnacle and the epitome and the summary of all of Jesus' obedience to God. So when we say the cross is enough, we are not saying, "And therefore we don't need Jesus' other works of obedience." Jesus' cross was the epitome of all of his obedience.

What we are trying to guard against here is getting ourselves into a position where we say, "The cross of Jesus wasn't enough; remember

that something else is required too." No. Jesus said, "It is finished" and immediately said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Jesus, having finished all things—active and passive obedience, substitutionary obedience and substitutionary atonement—went to his Father.

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Let us finish our night with prayer.

Our Father which art in heaven, we thank thee for our savior, Jesus Christ. What thou hast done is overwhelming to us, for thou hast given him who is the Lord of heaven, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, to be our savior and to give himself on our behalf and to obey thy law in our place. And thou hast counted to us all his many holy works and all his atonement as ours, so that it is as if we ourselves had satisfied the curse and we ourselves had obeyed all thy law. What a wonder to us. Thou art good. We pray that thou wilt apply this gospel to our hearts for our comfort and for thy glory. May it encourage us. May it carry us along in the remaining days of this week, until we may come into thy house again on the Lord's day and be fed in the green pastures of thy word. Take not the gospel from us, but give us that gospel and thy Spirit to carry it to our hearts. Forgive what we have done in sin. Keep us from sin. Give us the life of gratitude that comes from this gospel. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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## Article LXXXIII. The New King and His Kingdom (continued)

When we study the manifestation and development of the New King and His Kingdom, the kingdom of grace, in the period before the deluge, we must be satisfied with but very few data. Scripture does not inform us in detail concerning the prediluvian period. In a few chapters it pictures to us the general condition and follows the general line of development. It seems to hasten onward to the time of the flood, and especially to Abraham, in order then to linger and narrate in detail the first beginnings of the Old Testament manifestation of the Kingdom of God in the world.

We would probably have this different.

The desire can hardly be suppressed that we might be able to restore to our imagination completely the history of that time. We would like to draw a very full and concrete picture of it. We feel that it must have been fraught with events of great significance, at least of strong interest to us. How rich a period it must have been! How we would like to learn all about these men that lived to be nearly ten centuries old! How crowded their lives must have been with rich and wonderful experiences! How we would like to picture those gigantic figures of the prediluvian age as they struck out on entirely new and untrodden paths of industry and art! Above all, how we would be pleased to know more about the life of our first parents, and of the witnesses of faith, their conception of the promise, their worship of God, their struggles and difficulties, the enemies with which they fought in battle, of Abel and Enoch, those giants of faith! When we think about it all, when our imagination connects itself with the few facts we do know about that prediluvian dispensation, we feel the longing to have that entire period restored to our knowledge.

Yet Scripture follows a different method. It just barely scans the surface of the history before the flood, calls the attention to a few outstanding facts, and hastens on with its narrative till it reaches the close of the period in the deluge. And the reason is evident. It is not the purpose of the Word of God to present us with a complete history of the world. Facts that might otherwise be deemed of great significance in secular history Holy Writ simply passes by in silence. Still less is it the intention of Scripture to satisfy our natural curiosity and the tendency of our imagination to picture things and events in detail. Much that might be of interest to us in the lives of our first parents, and even in the lives of the prediluvian patriots, is entirely omitted. The purpose of Scripture is to reveal the God of our salvation, to picture the manifestation, and in the main the development of the Kingdom of God in the world. Hence, the narrative does not linger in that early period, the first dispensation of the history of grace. For, surely, there was also at that time some manifestation of that kingdom. The life of the kingdom was lived, the battle of the kingdom was fought, the mother-promise was very plainly realized. We feel immediately that from the point of view of grace there was undoubtedly as much in the life of Enoch, who walked with God and was no more because God had taken him away, as in that of Abraham, that is worthy of narration. And thus it must have been with the life of many a patriarch before the flood. But the difference is that in Abraham, Isaac and Jacob we have the actual beginning of the Old Testament form of the kingdom of God in the world as well as of the kingdom of God in the new dispensation; while the prediluvian world is destined to find its

termination in the catastrophe of the deluge. The first world is short lived. It is doomed to an early destruction. And it is only after the flood that the kingdom of God is to develop uninterruptedly in the world. And it is for that reason that Scripture just scans the history of the prediluvian period and fails to narrate much that might be of as great interest to us as is the life of Abraham.

This fact must be clear before our minds in order to estimate correctly the history of those 16 centuries before the deluge. Otherwise we are liable to draw the conclusion that there was very little manifestation of grace during that period of which Scripture tells us so little. And yet, this conclusion would be altogether unwarranted. There must have been a very bright manifestation of the true life of grace in those days. In the first place it should never be forgotten that the long duration of life which in the line of Cain was conducive to the quick development of sin was a blessing to the descendants of Seth. Even though Scripture does not narrate the facts in this respect it can readily be seen that the presence of Adam and Eve, who had been personally acquainted with the state of righteousness in paradise and who had experienced the fall into sin and misery, must have been of influence upon the children of God. In the second place there is the general fact that revelation, especially the promise of the Seed, was preserved by oral tradition much more readily and safely because of this longevity of the prediluvian patriarchs. For almost a thousand years Adam could witness of the promise as having received it directly from God. If we remember that Adam's life extended for some fifty years into that of Lamech, the father of Noah, we will see the significance of this fact. The narrative of paradise, of the original state of our first parents, their fall into sin and the first manifestation of grace in the mother-promise, did have to be handed down only from Adam to Lamech, and from the latter to Noah in order to be carried through the deluge into the post-diluvian world. But even if we would not call the attention to this fact, it stands without fear of contradiction that in a period as

the prediluvian the power of grace must have operated very strongly. The very fact that there were saints, "sons of God," for centuries in the midst of a world that abounded in wickedness, is proof of this. We all know how difficult it is for the people of God to maintain themselves when all the world apostatizes from the living God and opposes the truth. In such periods the Church fights a hard battle. And to fight this hard battle there is need of a powerful operation of grace in the hearts of God's saints. Such a period of hostility and wickedness on the part of the world, such a period of hard battle it was before the flood. And, therefore, we may depend upon it, that in that age God's grace worked very powerfully, and there must have been a bright and clear manifestation of the power and life of the New Kingdom.

Neither need we rely altogether upon our imagination in this respect. In the brief narrative of Genesis 4 and 5 there is sufficient evidence of the fact that God realized from the first the promise He had given to Adam and Eve as addressed to the serpent: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed, it shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise its heel." In the first place that enmity against the serpent and its seed manifested itself soon and very strongly. We have called the attention to the fact before, that this enmity against Satan and his spiritual seed in the world is, positively speaking, friendship with God. The original relation of friendship with God to which man was adapted by reason of his creation after God's image had been broken through sin. It could be restored only by saving grace and that through the power of saving faith. And this was realized very plainly before the flood. The first illustration of it we possess in the figure of Abel, the first martyr. He possessed the faith. In that faith he offered a better sacrifice than Cain. By that same faith he gave testimony and bore witness against the wickedness of his brother. In that faith he gained the spiritual victory even though according to the standard of the world he was defeated. He clung to the promise and was justified; and while seeking a better country, he

received his reward. That faith was the power of God's grace working enmity against the serpent and his seed in the heart of Abel. By that faith Abel was the friend of God and, consequently, His representative in the world over against the godlessness of his brother.

A still clearer illustration of this fact we possess in Enoch. He constitutes one of the unique persons in the history of the kingdom, to be compared only with Elijah. Even as with Elijah, the friendship of Jehovah was the dominating principle in his life. We read of him that he walked with God. Twice this is emphasized in the brief narrative we possess of his life. "And Enoch lived sixty and five years and begat Methuselah: And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters: And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years: And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him." This phrase, "walking with God," must not be confused with the similar expressions "walking before God" and "walking after God," which also occur in Scripture. The latter phrases rather denote a blameless life according to the law, the life of obedience, the walking in the way of God's precepts. But to walk with God has a deeper significance. There is only one passage in Scripture besides the one quoted from Gen. 5:21-24 where the expression occurs, namely in Mal. 2:6. There the phrase is used, not of the faithful Israelites generally, but of the priests, who were privileged to enter into the sanctuary, and, therefore, to exercise a closer communion, a more direct intercourse with Jehovah than the rest of the people. It is to this intimate communion, to this direct intercourse with God, to the communion with the Most High as a friend communes with his friend, that the expression refers. And, therefore, of Enoch it is emphasized that he was the friend of God in a very specific sense of the word. The power of grace operated strongly upon him. His faith was strong. The life of God's covenant, the life of the New Kingdom, came to a very advanced stage of development and to a very beautiful manifestation, even so that it might be said of him that he walked with God as

a friend walked with his friend. This is corroborated by the fact that Enoch appeared as God's party in the world of his time. We read of him in Jude:14-16: "And to these also Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their works of ungodliness which they have ungodly wrought, and of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him." It is not necessary now to enter into the question as to how Enoch had received knowledge of the coming of the Lord for judgment at that early period. His walking with God, his direct and intimate intercourse with Jehovah, would sufficiently account for this knowledge. But what we wish to emphasize is that Enoch did prophesy. The world of his time was ungodly. They spoke hard things against the God of Enoch. They blasphemed His name. They were trampling under foot His precepts. They were abounding in wickedness. And Enoch was the friend of God. By grace he lived the life of God's covenant. And as the friend of God he was God's party in the world. Also in this respect he was like Elijah, whose zeal for the name of Jehovah left him no rest in a time of great apostasy. And so unique was the operation of God's grace in Enoch as well as in Elijah, that like the latter he did not see death, but was translated into glory before he saw corruption.

Surely, the power of the New Kingdom operated strongly and became very beautifully manifest in these two early witnesses of the prediluvian period.

The friendship of God, the life of God's covenant was there.

That life of God's covenant manifested itself as enmity against the serpent.

In the power of that life through faith they manifested themselves as God's party in the world.

And though the serpent might bruise the heel of the woman's seed even in their case, they gained the victory, a victory which was not according to the standard of this world, but spiritual and eternal.

—Grand Rapids, Mich.