

Vespers, Lent III
22 March 2009
Concordia Lutheran Mission
Terrebonne, Oregon

"Christ Obeyed God Perfectly, Even from His Innermost Being, for the Salvation of Men."

"I will bless the LORD, who hath given me counsel:
my reins also instruct me in the night seasons."

Psalm 16:7

Introduction

How far does obedience to God go? Well, there is no limit to obedience to God. As far as God reaches and wherever God is, there obedience is owed to God. Obedience to God, therefore, has no limit and goes on forever, both without and within.

Without, our conduct should comport with obedience to God and His Word.

Likewise, within, our conduct, our thoughts, words, deeds, feelings, and passions should comport with obedience to God and His Word.

In Psalm 16 we see Christ's obedience within, i.e. His internal conduct, when He says, "my reins instruct me in the night seasons."¹ Reins refers to the very inner core of Christ's being.² And we see that He was continuously and perfectly obedient to God from His core, from

¹**Psalm 16:7.**

²"fig., as seat of emotion and affection ...; hence, as involving character, the obj. of God's examination" *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs, s.v. "**cilyah**", p. 480. "The kidneys. They were supposed by the ancient Hebrews and others to be the seat of the innermost emotions" *Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. "**reins**", p. 512.

Luther: "According to others, the 'kidneys,' that is, sensibility and carnal emotions, 'have instructed' Christ. [Ps. 139:13: 'For Thou hast possessed My reins']. ... Thus in the case of Christ it is a prerogative that even the kidneys always directed Him toward the better, and yet these same kidneys turn others who have been corrupted in sin toward sin by a wretched craving for pleasure. And so, while in others even the intellect has been made almost totally sensual, in Christ it has not only remained intellectual, but also His senses and His 'kidneys' were entirely spiritual and intellectual. This is what all the blessed will be in the future. And this will be the

the innermost fiber of His being, 24/7, 365 days a year, in good times and as we see in Psalm 16 in the extreme adversity of the night seasons³, i.e. His Passion.

And Christ's obedience also manifests itself outwardly when He blesses the Lord saying, "I will bless the LORD, who has given me counsel."⁴ For from the heart, from within, proceeds the good without.

And this immaculate obedience and perfection is of great comfort to us, *for it is ours*. Christ completed this human obedience not for Himself – He after all is God and has no need for human obedience or any other human experience – but rather for us. Now we know that our obedience to God is perfect because Christ's immaculate obedience is our obedience, given to us in our Baptism so that we are without spot or blemish, but rather we possess the immaculate righteousness of God within and without that yields life eternal.

I. Christ Obeyed God Perfectly Within and Without in Order to Save Men from their sins.

A. God demands perfect obedience, within and without.

Perhaps one of the reasons Christ's perfect obedience in our behalf gets so little play is because, as a human rule, men do not think that God demands perfection. And certainly, if God does not demand perfection of our behavior without, then certainly He wouldn't demand perfection of our behavior within, of our thoughts, feelings, emotions, and passions.

Yet, God does demand perfection without *and* within. In Catechism we learned:

What does God require of us in the Ninth Commandment? God requires that our hearts be filled with *holy desires only*. ... Ye shall *be holy*; for I, the Lord, your God, am holy.⁵

Frequently, outrage is the response to such demands of God. We think a certain level of outward or civic righteousness⁶ is acceptable to God. But that is not so. God is perfect without

case 'in the night,' that is, in adversities; for by these the 'kidneys' will be chastened toward the good. Hence He is ambidextrous like Ehud (Judg. 3:15), because even His senses are right-handed." *Luther's Works*, Vol. 10, pp. 108, 109.

³Luther: "And this will be the case 'in the night,' that is, in adversities; for by these the 'kidneys' will be chastened toward the good." *Luther's Works*, Vol. 10, p. 109.

⁴**Psalm 16:7.**

⁵*The Small Catechism*, question 72, p. 79.

⁶"It is true that we distinguish a certain form of civic righteousness, with certain virtues connected with the outward maintenance of civic authority in the world, such as obedience

24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, from eternity to eternity. And God expects the same of us. This demand of perfection outrages men. Prior to his understanding of the Gospel, Luther's reaction to God was classic and emblematic of fallen man's outrage in response to the perfect God:

Now, my condition was this: Although I was leading the life of a holy and blameless monk, I discovered that [sic] in the sight of God I was a great sinner. Moreover, my conscience was troubled and distressed, nor did I venture to reconcile God with my own satisfactions and merits. For this reason *I did not at all love this righteous and angry God*, who punishes sinners, *but I hated Him* and was full of secret anger against Him, and that, in all seriousness.⁷

If, then, our outward conduct is inadequate, how much more so our inward conduct, our thoughts, feelings, and passions? These are often uncontrollable. Yet these lusts loom large and also condemn us. Jesus says:

But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are *the things* which defile a man....⁸

Christ says these things "defile a man", i.e. make him unholy. And if they make man unholy, then God, who is the Holy One, is judging this behavior within. In the Psalms we read:

Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end; but establish the just; for the righteous God trieth the hearts and reins.⁹

Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart.¹⁰

to the laws, honesty in 'business', etc. It is true, also, that man has a free will to choose such outward manifestations and civic virtues and that they are often rewarded by a measure of wealth and honor in the world. But such exhibitions are not necessarily connected with a regenerated heart; they may be the outflow of natural altruism and even of the most extreme selfishness. They have nothing in common, therefore, with the essence of good works as found in the lives of Christians." *Concordia Cyclopedia*, s.v. "Good works", p. 296.

⁷Quoted in The Rev. Dr. C. F. W. Walther's, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, p. 244.

⁸**St. Matthew 15:18, 19.**

⁹**Psalm 7:9.**

¹⁰**Psalm 26:2.**

And in the prophet Jeremiah we read:

But, O LORD of hosts, that judges righteously, that triest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them for unto thee have I revealed my cause.¹¹

I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, *and* according to the fruit of his doings.¹²

But, O LORD of hosts, that triest the righteous, *and* seest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I opened my cause.¹³

God tries, i.e. tests, the heart and the reins. That means God scrutinizes men within and judges their internal behavior. And if this internal behavior is flawed, then God rightly condemns, for we are to be perfect as He is perfect.

God, after all, is perfect within 24/7, 365 days a year, from eternity to eternity. We are created in His Image. In Catechism we learned we are created in God's Image and, therefore, perfectly holy and righteous:

What was the image of God? The image of God consisted in this – A. That man *knew God* and was *perfectly happy* in such knowledge. ... [Ye] have put on the new man, which is renewed in *knowledge* after the *image of Him that created him*. Col. 3:10. B. That man was *perfectly holy* and blessed. ... Put on the new man, which *after God* is created in *righteousness and true holiness*. Eph. 4:24.¹⁴

We, therefore, being created in His Image, ought to be like Him, perfectly pure and holy within 24/7, 365 days a year, forever. Anything short of that God condemns, for He tries, that is to say, He tests and judges, our heart and reins. Jesus, therefore, says:

But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are *the things*

¹¹**Jeremiah 11:20.**

¹²**Jeremiah 17:10.**

¹³**Jeremiah 20:12.**

¹⁴*The Small Catechism*, p. 97.

which defile a man....¹⁵

B. Christ's Active Obedience means He was pure and perfectly obedient within and without for all men in order to save them.

At this point we, like Jesus' disciples, might cry out, "Who then can be saved?"¹⁶ Based upon our own efforts, it would be impossible. But with God, all things are possible. So, Jesus answered His disciples:

With men *it is* impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.¹⁷

So, it is possible with God; but is it something God desires? The answer, thankfully, is yes. God desired to step into the breach for us. St. John the Apostle writes:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.¹⁸

Likewise, St. Paul writes:

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.¹⁹

God's Son, then, became a man and placed Himself under the law and our obligations under the law in order to redeem us from our failure to keep God's law. Christ, therefore, fulfilled the law without and within. Jesus, therefore, says in verse seven of Psalm 16:

... my reins also instruct me in the night seasons.²⁰

The reins are the innermost core of a man's being, as we've seen from Scripture. Here, Christ is found absolutely obedient to God's Word. And Christ, moreover, is perfectly obedient

¹⁵**St. Matthew 15:18, 19.**

¹⁶**St. Mark 10:26.**

¹⁷**St. Mark 10:27.**

¹⁸**St. John 3:16.**

¹⁹**Galatians 4:4-5.**

²⁰**Psalm 16:7.**

at all times, including during His suffering, as we see here in Psalm 16. For Jesus says that “His reins instruct Him in the night seasons.” The night seasons are a time of affliction.²¹ Christ’s affliction included the suffering of the rejection of God²², i.e. suffered the torments of hell, because He bore the sins of the world. In the Catechism we read:

346 About the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying ... My God, My God, why hast *Thou forsaken Me?* *Matt. 27:46* (**He suffered the tortures of the damned in hell.**)²³

Even under these terrible circumstances, every last fiber of Christ’s being is directed faithfully toward God’s will and fulfilling it in every respect, even in the worst moments of His life.

Whereas we, like Job’s wife suggested, are prone by our passion to curse God²⁴ in the midst of adversity, Christ continues to love God perfectly. Whereas our passions tend to be ungovernable, Christ’s passions are perfectly and happily aligned with God’s will every moment. While our emotions tend to inflame into a conflagration of blasphemy in difficult times, Christ’s emotions harmoniously sing perfect praise to God and warmly embrace God in the midst of adversity no man save Christ has known: God’s eternal rejection. And from this faithfulness within proceeds Christ’s faithfulness and obedience to God without. Jesus, therefore, believes with the heart and confesses and praises God with His lips²⁵:

I will bless the LORD, who hath given me counsel....²⁶

In addition, Christ receives instruction from the Lord throughout His life, and especially in the midst of His Passion. Jesus says:

I will bless the LORD, who hath given me counsel....²⁷

²¹Luther: “And this will be the case ‘in the night,’ that is, in adversities; for by these the ‘kidneys’ will be chastened toward the good.” *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 10, p. 109.

²²Hence, Christ cries out in Psalm 22: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? *why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?* O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.” verses 1-2.

²³*The Small Catechism*, question 138 B, p. 112, emphasis added.

²⁴**Job 2:9.**

²⁵“For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” **Romans 10:10.**

²⁶**Psalm 16:7.**

Throughout His life, Christ receives counsel from the Lord in His Work to redeem men from their sins. The prophet Isaiah, for example, writes that Christ possesses the Spirit of Counsel, namely, the Holy Spirit, who assisted Him in His task of working out man's redemption:

And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge of the fear of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears; But with righteousness shall he judge²⁸ the poor....²⁹

The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard writes

The reason why this Child, this Son, is also called **Counselor** is that He, in counsel with [the other Person of] the Holy Trinity, helped teach the conclusion of how fallen mankind could be helped again. The unending righteousness of God was offended by the Fall of Adam. Now then, there was only an unending payment required, which neither angel nor man could provide. Therefore there was no counsel either in heaven or upon earth. Thus, the Son of God, the eternal Wisdom, came up with the counsel that He would volunteer Himself as Mediator and Redeemer, that He especially in the fulness of time wanted to take into Himself human nature and within it make payment for us men.³⁰

Christ's reins, therefore, His innermost being, feelings, passions, and desires were all

²⁷**Psalm 16:7.**

²⁸This judgment is the blessed judgment of absolution which declares those who are poor in righteousness, namely sinners, forgiven and filled with Christ's righteousness. Luther: "... the people of Christ's kingdom are the poor, the mean, the insignificant, the faint-hearted, the harassed, the lowly, the fearful. These He will judge; that is, He will make the just cause prevail, He will justify them, He will give them grace, He will forgive the sins of those who acknowledge and confess them and do not rely on themselves." *Luther's Works*, Vol. 16, p. 121.

²⁹**Isaiah 11:2-3, 4.**

³⁰*Seven Christmas Sermons*, pp. 75, 76. "Johann Gerhard (1582-1637) has rightly been classified the 'third preeminent Lutheran theologian after Luther and Chemnitz.' ... However, while Gerhard is best remembered for his great dogmatics, the *Loci Theologici*, Gerhard produced a number of devotional volumes and preach many sermons to the 'common man.' The sermons in this volume were apparently preached when Gerhard was 31 years old and already superintendent at Heldburg and a Doctor of Divinity." **Foreword.**

perfectly in accord with God's Word and God's desire to redeem mankind through this Work. Luther writes:

Thus in the case of Christ it is a prerogative that even the kidneys always direct Him toward the better, and yet these same kidneys turn others who have been corrupted in sin toward sin by a wretched craving for pleasure. And so, while in others even the intellect has been made almost totally sensual, in Christ it has not only remained intellectual, but also His senses and His 'kidneys' were entirely spiritual and intellectual. This is what all the blessed will be in the future. And this will be the case 'in the night,' that is, in adversities; for by these the 'kidneys' will be chastened toward the good.³¹

We also see Christ's humiliation for, according to His human nature, He suffered to be counseled and instructed by God even though He Himself is God:

I will bless the LORD, who hath given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night seasons.³²

St. Paul writes:

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.³³

God, then, tested the reins and heart of Christ, the very core of His being, and He excelled, passing with flying colors. And this is good news for us because the soundness of His reins, His innermost being, is ours and, therefore, our salvation. Hence, Luther writes:

*This is what all the blessed will be in the future.*³⁴

C. Christ enjoys success for us also in His Passive Obedience.

But, might someone object that Christ failed God's test of heart and reins because in another Psalm Jesus says:

I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like

³¹Luther's Works, Vol. 10, p. 109.

³²Psalm 16:7.

³³Hebrews 5:8.

³⁴Luther's Works, Vol. 10, p. 109, emphasis added.

wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.³⁵

Christ did not fail, but again passed with flying colors. For the melting of His Blessed Heart like wax and breaking of Christ's Blessed Heart was the will of God to save men from their sins. Christ is God's sacrifice for the sins of men. After all, Jesus, after praying that this cup pass from Him, submitted to God's will and said:

O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.³⁶

God wanted Christ to give up His life, which included letting His Blessed Heart melt like wax and expire, in order to atone for the sins of the world and save it. Jesus says:

Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.³⁷

Christ, then, let His Blessed Heart melt and Himself expire in perfect obedience to God's will in order to save us from our sins. St. Paul writes:

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.³⁸

Jesus' Blessed Heart, then, did not fail, but passed God's test and enjoyed success even when it melted like wax and expired because that's exactly what God desired of Him in order to atone for the sins of all men. Christ's Passion vividly manifests His entire obedience for us.³⁹

³⁵**Psalm 22:14.**

³⁶**St. Matthew 26:42.**

³⁷**St. John 10:17-18.**

³⁸**Philippians 2:8.**

³⁹“Gerhard: ‘Although in many passages of Scripture the work of redemption is ascribed to Christ's death and the shedding of His blood, yet this must by no means be understood *exclusive*, as if by it the holy life of Christ were excluded from the work of redemption. But it is done for the reason that nowhere does the fact that the Lord has loved and redeemed us shine forth more clearly than in His Passion, death, and wounds, as the devout old teachers say; the death of Christ is, as it were, the last line and completion, ... the end and perfection, of the entire obedience, as the Apostle says in Phil. 2:8. In this merit it is altogether impossible to separate

II. Christ Gives to Men Eternal Life by Giving His Perfect Obedience Within and Without in the Gospel.

A. Christ Gives to Men His Perfect Obedience Within and Without in the Gospel.

And this perfect obedience within and without Christ gives to men through the Gospel. St. Paul writes:

... Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.⁴⁰

In other words, Christ, even in the midst of His Passion, His great agony of body and soul for our sins, was crafting for us the Means by which He would give to us His perfect obedience within and without: *Holy Baptism*, the Gospel. Luther writes:

... holy baptism was purchased for us through this same blood, which he shed for us and with which he paid for sin. This blood and its merit and power he put into baptism, in order that in baptism we might receive it. For whenever a person receives baptism in faith this is the same as if he were visibly washed and cleansed of sin with the blood of Christ. For we do not gain the forgiveness of sins through our work, but rather through the death and the shedding of the blood of the Son of God. But he takes this forgiveness of sins and tucks it into baptism.⁴¹

Jesus, then, distributes to men His perfect obedience and, therefore, immaculate righteousness through the Gospel. The Lutheran Church states:

For although the work is accomplished and the forgiveness of sins acquired on the cross, yet it cannot come to us in any other way than through the Word. Whence do they know of it, or how can they apprehend and appropriate to themselves the forgiveness, except they lay hold of and believe the Scriptures and the Gospel? But now the entire Gospel and the article of the Creed: *I believe a holy Christian Church, the forgiveness of sins, etc.*, are by the Word embodied in this Sacrament

the active from the passive obedience.”” The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 376, footnote 81.

⁴⁰**Ephesians 5:25, 26-27.**

⁴¹*Luther's Works*, Vol. 51, p. 325.

[of the Altar] and presented to us.⁴²

B. This perfect righteousness of Christ within and without gives life eternal.

And this gift of Christ's perfect obedience and immaculate righteousness within and without is a wonderful comfort to Christians. For we now know that by faith, our heart and reins have been tested by God and found to be absolutely firm and sound. Within us, even though we are fallen creatures, lives by faith a perfectly wholesome, sound, and pulsating human life pleasing to God. The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, past President of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, writes of Christ's Active Obedience given to us:

This teaching of Scripture is of great practical importance. In his life of faith the Christian continually resorts to Christ's vicarious fulfillment of the Law. Luther: "He satisfied the Law; He fulfilled the Law perfectly, for He loved God with all His heart, and with all His soul, and with all His strength, and with all His mind, and He loved His neighbor as Himself. Therefore, when the Law comes and accuses you of not having kept it, bid it go to Christ. Say: There is the Man who has kept it; He fulfilled it for me and gave His fulfillment to me. Thus the Law is silenced."⁴³

And this righteousness within and without is the righteousness of God in Christ. St. Paul writes:

For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.⁴⁴

And standing in the righteousness of God and, therefore, with God, we know we shall stand the test on judgment day. For Christ by His Blessed Obedience has passed that test already for us and given His success to us through the Gospel.

Conclusion

Christ's immaculate and perfect obedience without and within was done for us who are bereft of this obedience and, thereby, the righteousness which avails before God because of our sin.

⁴²*The Large Catechism, Part Fifth, Of the Sacrament of the Altar.* 31, 32, *Triglotta*, p. 759.

⁴³*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 375.

⁴⁴**II Corinthians 5:21.**

Because our obedience and righteousness is Christ's, then without and within we are pleasing to God, there being no stone left unturned by God and, therefore, no surprises. We rest perfectly assured that we are God's children, His Kingdom is ours, and we do and will enjoy life everlasting with Him. *Amen.*