

The Augsburg Confession

Article 6

The New Obedience

The title for this article is “New Obedience”. While that term does not occur in our article, it is a good summary of what is being presented here.

Note: Many of the titles we have for the articles of the Augsburg Confession in our *Book of Concord* were not put there at the time of the reformers, but were added later in history. This is noted in most of our copies by putting those titles which were added later in square brackets.

What does new obedience refer to? The term new obedience is used to describe the child of God’s keeping of the Law and will of God as a result of faith which is created in their heart through the working of the Holy Spirit through the Word. This obedience to the will of God is called “new” obedience because it flows from faith and is a fruit of faith.

The Bible uses the word “sanctification” to describe this new obedience. The Bible uses the term “sanctification” in two ways – in a broad sense and in a narrow sense.

- In the broad sense the Bible uses the term sanctification to refer to everything that the Holy Spirit does for the salvation of sinners. For example Paul writes: ***“Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish”*** (Ephesians 5:25-27). [Compare: 1 Peter 1:1-2; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Acts 26:17-18.]
- The Holy Spirit also uses the word sanctification in a narrow sense, specifically referring to the new life God enables the Christian to lead through faith in Jesus. Again Paul writes: ***“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take***

advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness” (1 Thessalonians 4:3-7). [Compare: 2 Corinthians 7:1; Ephesians 4-5.] Generally, when we speak of sanctification, we use it in this narrow sense - the new obedience which the child of God lives as a result of faith.

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Regarding the new obedience of the child of God the Lutheran confessors stated: *It is also taught among us that such faith should produce good fruits and good works and that we must do all such good works as God has commanded, but we should do them for God’s sake and not place our trust in them as if thereby to merit favor before God. For we receive forgiveness of sin and righteousness through faith in Christ, as Christ Himself says, “So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy servants’” (Luke 17:10). The Fathers also teach thus, for Ambrose says, “It is ordained of God that whoever believes in Christ shall be saved, and he shall have forgiveness of sins, not through works but through faith alone, without merit.”*

It is important to note the order in which these articles are presented in the Augsburg Confession: [Of God](#) (I), [Of Sin](#) (II), [Of the Son of God](#) (III), [Of Justification](#) (IV), [Of the Means of Grace](#) (V), and now [Of the New Obedience](#) (VI). The person of Christ was spoken of in Article 3, which led to the work of Christ in Article 4, which led to the means by which we receive what He has accomplished for us, which now leads to the earthly result of the Gospel in our lives: New Obedience. This order is important because it points out first things first - justification before God through faith in Christ must precede the new obedience.

Obedience the Result of Faith

Notice how the confessors point out that this new obedience is the result of justifying faith with the opening words: *It is also taught among us that such faith should produce good fruits and good works...* The words “such faith” refer back to the faith spoken of in Article 4 on justification: *“For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness, as Paul says...”*. That is reiterated again in this article when they write: *For we receive forgiveness of sin and righteousness through faith in Christ, as Christ Himself says....* Justification through faith is the cause of new obedience.

There are many passages in Scripture which speak of new obedience, that is, the new lives we live (or should live) in Christ. It can be easy when reading such sections to focus on what we

should do for God and lose sight of what God has done (and continues to do) for us. But Scripture continually reminds us of the proper relationship between faith in Christ (justification) and new obedience (sanctification):

Paul said: “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

John wrote: “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.... We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:7-11,19).

God’s love for us is the foundation of our love for Him and for our neighbor. But Scripture goes one step further. The Holy Spirit makes it very clear that true obedience to God and His will can only come as a result of saving faith in the heart of an individual. In the great faith chapter of Hebrews 11, we are told:

“By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, ‘and was not found, because God had taken him’; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:5-6).

New obedience can only come as a result of justification through faith. Without justification through faith, new obedience cannot exist. At the same time, justification through faith does not exist without new obedience.

“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:26).

Jesus said, *“every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matthew 7:17-19).*

Conclusion

While justification and new obedience are closely connected, the following chart outlines several key differences.

Contrasts	
Justification	Sanctification
Involves change in people’s status before God Excludes all human works Is complete and perfect in Christ Embraces all people Gives us complete certainty of salvation	Involves change in people’s hearts and lives Consists in good works Is imperfect and incomplete in this world Takes place only in believers Produces evidence of faith but doesn’t give us complete certainty of salvation

New obedience is the work of God in the child of God. It flows from God’s act of declaring us “not guilty” through faith in Christ, and it can in no way merit forgiveness or anything from God.