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Breathing the Fresh Air of Liberty in Jesus Christ

Galatians 5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

“Christ Lives in Me”

October 13, 2013

Sermon Text: Galatians 2:19-21

Scripture Reading:

Introduction-

Galatians 2:19-21 For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. (20) I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son

of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (21) I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

Through the Law I Died to the Law

Last time we looked closely at verse 19 – *For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God.* This statement comes in the midst of Paul’s admonishment of Peter, who was guilty of denying the gospel by his actions. Peter’s withdrawal from eating with the Gentile believers once Jewish Christians from Jerusalem arrived at Antioch was a statement that the Christian is still under the law. Paul would have none of that.

Verse 19 is really a very concise statement of the function of the law in our salvation. Through the unbending, holy requirements of the law of God, the sinner is condemned and cursed. That is what the law does. It kills.

2 Corinthians 3:5-9 Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, (6) who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. **For the letter kills**, but the Spirit gives life. (7) Now if **the ministry of death**, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, (8) will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? (9) For if there was glory in **the ministry of condemnation**, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory.

Let's never forget this. The law kills, and anyone who sets out to be "good" by supposedly keeping the law, or some law of their own making even, will remain dead and condemned and cursed before God. Why? Because as we will see later in Galatians, holiness demands legal perfection. The law only curses and damns.

And yet...it is in this killing work of the law that we are saved! *Through the law, I DIED TO THE LAW.* Understand? The law has no more power over a dead man! Listen to this in Romans—

Romans 7:1-6 Or do you not know, brothers--for I am speaking to those who know the law--that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives? (2) For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. (3) Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress. (4) Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. (5) For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. (6) But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

And notice how we died to the law. It was the law that put Christ on the cross. He had to meet its demands for OUR sin. And in HIM we died! Died to the law—

Colossians 2:13-19 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, (14) **by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.** (15) He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. (16) Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. (17) These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. (18) Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, (19) and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

Which leads us right into verse 20. *I have been crucified with Christ.* THAT is the means by which YOU, Christian, have died to the law. You were condemned by it, it demanded your death, you were dead in God's sight, but that very law which

demanded your death and condemned you is the law that Christ died to, the law whose demands Christ met, nailing it in His own body on the cross. Paid! *Through the law I die to the law!* The God whose own holy demands are what the law is, also provided a means by which WE could die, and yet be righteous. God is just, and yet He is the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. The thing is brilliant! It is the gospel. NEVER, NEVER, NEVER LIVE AS IF YOU WERE STILL UNDER THE LAW!

Martin Luther: Master of Monkenry

Let's take some time now and listen to a wonderful illustration of the law doing its work. This is an account of how Martin Luther was condemned by the law – or rather, how he came to understand that he was condemned. This is another way we die to the law – we die to our trust in it, or rather, to trust in our own supposed goodness in contrast with the holiness of God.

The following is from the biography of Luther by Roland Bainton, Here I Stand:

Luther appears to have been different from other youths of his time, namely, in that he was extraordinarily sensitive and subject to recurrent

periods of exaltation and depression of spirit. This oscillation of mood plagued him throughout his life. He testified that it began in his youth and that the depressions had been acute in the six months prior to his entry into the monastery. One cannot dismiss these states as occasioned merely by adolescence, since he was then twenty-one and similar experiences continued throughout his adult years. Neither can one blithely write off the case as an example of manic depression, since the patient exhibited a prodigious and continuous capacity for work of a high order.

The explanation lies rather in the tensions which medieval religion deliberately induced, playing alternately upon fear and hope. Hell was stoked, not because men lived in perpetual dread, but precisely because they did not, and in order to instill enough fear to drive them to the sacraments of the Church. If they were petrified with terror, purgatory was introduced by way of mitigation as an intermediate

place where those not bad enough for hell nor good enough for heaven might make further expiation. If this alleviation inspired complacency, the temperature was advanced on purgatory, and then the pressure was again relaxed through indulgences.

Even more disconcerting than the fluctuation of the temperature of the afterlife was the oscillation between wrath and mercy on the part of the members of the divine hierarchy. God was portrayed now as the Father, now as the wielder of the thunder. He might be softened by the intercession of his kindlier Son, who again was delineated as an implacable judge unless mollified by his mother, who, being a woman, was not above cheating alike God and the Devil on behalf of her suppliants; and if she were remote, one could enlist her mother, St. Anne.

How these themes were presented is graphically illustrated in the most popular handbooks in the very age of

the Renaissance. The theme was death; and the best sellers gave instructions, not on how to pay the income tax, but on how to escape hell. Manuals entitled On the Art of Dying depicted in lurid woodcuts the departing spirit surrounded by fiends who tempted him to commit the irrevocable sin of abandoning hope in God's mercy. To convince him that he was already beyond pardon he was confronted by the woman with whom he had committed adultery or the beggar he had failed to feed. A companion woodcut then gave encouragement by presenting the figures of forgiven sinners: Peter with his cock, Mary Magdalene with her cruse, the penitent thief, and Saul the persecutor, with the concluding brief caption, "Never despair."

If this conclusion ministered to complacency, other presentations invoked dread. A book strikingly illustrative of the prevailing mood is a history of the world published by Hartmann Schedel in Nürnberg in 1493. The

massive folios, after recounting the history of mankind from Adam to the Humanist Conrad Celtes, conclude with a meditation on the brevity of human existence accompanied by a woodcut of the dance of death. The final scene displays the day of judgment. A full-page woodcut portrays Christ the Judge sitting upon a rainbow. A lily extends from his right ear, signifying the redeemed, who below are being ushered by angels into paradise. From his left ear protrudes a sword, symbolizing the doom of the damned, whom the devils drag by the hair from the tombs and cast into the flames of hell...Every one of those now dead would some day rise and stand with the innumerable host of the departed before the judgment seat to hear the words, "Well done," or, "Depart from me into everlasting fire." The Christ upon the rainbow with the lily and the sword was a most familiar figure in the illustrated books of the period. Luther had seen pictures such as these and testified that he was

utterly terror-stricken at the sight of Christ the Judge.

Like everyone else in the Middle Ages Luther knew what to do about his plight. The Church taught that no sensible person would wait until his deathbed to make an act of contrition and plead for grace. From beginning to end the only secure course was to lay hold of every help the Church had to offer: sacraments, pilgrimages, indulgences, the intercession of the saints. Yet foolish was the man who relied solely on the good offices of the heavenly intercessors if he had done nothing to ensure their favor! And what better could he do than take the cowl?

Men believed the end of the world already had been postponed for the sake of the Cistercian monks. Christ had just "bidden the angel blow his trumpet for the Last Judgment, when the Mother of Mercy fell at the feet of her Son and besought Him to spare awhile, 'at least for my friends of the Cistercian Order, that they may prepare

themselves.' " The very devils complained of St. Benedict as a robber who had stolen souls out of their hands. He who died in the cowl would receive preferential treatment in heaven because of his habit. Once a Cistercian in a high fever cast off his frock and so died. Arriving at the gate of Paradise he was denied entry by St. Benedict because of the lack of uniform. He could only walk around the walls and peep in through the windows to see how the brethren fared, until one of them interceded for him, and St. Benedict granted a reprieve to earth for the missing garment. All this was of course popular piety. However much such crude notions might be deprecated by reputable theologians, this was what the common man believed, and Luther was a common man.

Yet even St. Thomas Aquinas himself declared the taking of the cowl to be second baptism, restoring the sinner to the state of innocence which he enjoyed when first baptized. The opinion was popular that if the monk should sin

thereafter, he was peculiarly privileged because in his case repentance would bring restoration to the state of innocence. Monasticism was the way par excellence to heaven.

The man who was later to revolt against monasticism became a monk for exactly the same reason as thousands of others, namely, in order to save his soul. The immediate occasion of his resolve to enter the cloister was the unexpected encounter with death on that sultry July day in 1505. He was then twenty-one and a student at the University of Erfurt. As he returned to school after a visit with his parents, sudden lightning struck him to earth. In that single flash he saw the denouement of the drama of existence. There was God the all-terrible, Christ the inexorable, and all the leering fiends springing from their lurking places in pond and wood that with sardonic cachinnations they might seize his shock of curly hair and bolt him into hell. It was no wonder that he cried out to his father's

saint, patroness of miners, "St. Anne help me! I will become a monk."

To the monastery he went like others, and even more than others, in order to make his peace with God.

His days as a novice were occupied with those religious exercises designed to suffuse the soul with peace. Prayers came seven times daily. After eight hours of sleep the monks were awakened between one and two in the morning by the ringing of the cloister bell. At the first summons they sprang up, made the sign of the cross, and pulled on the white robe and the scapular without which the brother was never to leave his cell. At the second bell each came reverently to the church, sprinkled himself with holy water, and knelt before the high altar with a prayer of devotion to the Saviour of the world. Then all took their places in the choir. Matins lasted three quarters of an hour. Each of the seven periods of the day ended with the chanting by the cantor of the Salve Regina: "Save, O

Queen, Thou Mother of mercy, our life, our delight, and our hope. To Thee we exiled sons of Eve lift up our cry. To Thee we sigh as we languish in this vale of tears. Be Thou our advocate. Sweet Virgin Mary, pray for us. Thou holy Mother of God." After the Ave Maria and the Pater Noster the brothers in pairs silently filed out of the church. With such exercises the day was filled. Brother Martin was sure that he was walking in the path the saints had trod.

Thus he might have continued had he not been overtaken by another thunderstorm, this time of the spirit. The occasion was the saying of his first mass. Luther took his place before the altar and began to recite the introductory portion of the mass until he came to the words, "We offer unto thee, the living, the true, the eternal God." He related afterward: At these words I was utterly stupefied and terror-stricken. I thought to myself, "With what tongue shall I address such Majesty, seeing that all men ought to tremble in the presence of

even an earthly prince? Who am I, that I should lift up mine eyes or raise my hands to the divine Majesty? The angels surround him. At his nod the earth trembles. And shall I, a miserable little pygmy, say 'I want this, I ask for that'? For I am dust and ashes and full of sin and I am speaking to the living, eternal and the true God." The terror of the Holy, the horror of Infinitude, smote him like a new lightning bolt, and only through a fearful restraint could he hold himself at the altar to the end.

Luther's tremor was augmented by the recognition of unworthiness. "I am dust and ashes and full of sin." Creatureliness and imperfection alike oppressed him. Toward God he was at once attracted and repelled. Only in harmony with the Ultimate could he find peace. But how could a pigmy stand before Divine Majesty; how could a transgressor confront divine Holiness? Before God the high and God the holy Luther was stupefied.

But the problem of the alienation of man from God had been renewed in altered form. Not merely in the hour of death but daily at the altar the priest stood in the presence of the All High and the All Holy. How could man abide God's presence unless he were himself holy? Luther set himself to the pursuit of holiness.

Monasticism constituted such a quest; and while Luther was in the world, he had looked upon the cloister in any form as the higher righteousness. But after becoming a monk he discovered levels within monasticism itself. Some monks were easygoing; some were strict. Those Carthusian lads prematurely old; that prince of Anhalt, mere animated bones— these were not typical examples. They were the rigorists, heroic athletes, seeking to take heaven by storm. Whether Luther's call to the monastery had been prompted by God or the Devil, he was now a monk, and a monk he would be to the uttermost.

One of the privileges of the monastic life was that it emancipated the sinner from all distractions and freed him to save his soul by practicing the counsels of perfection— not simply charity, sobriety, and love, but chastity, poverty, obedience, fastings, vigils, and mortifications of the flesh. Whatever good works a man might do to save himself, these Luther was resolved to perform.

He fasted, sometimes three days on end without a crumb. The seasons of fasting were more consoling to him than those of feasting. Lent was more comforting than Easter. He laid upon himself vigils and prayers in excess of those stipulated by the rule. He cast off the blankets permitted him and well-nigh froze himself to death. At times he was proud of his sanctity and would say, "I have done nothing wrong today." Then misgivings would arise. "Have you fasted enough? Are you poor enough?" He would then strip himself of all save that which decency required.

He believed in later life that his austerities had done permanent damage to his digestion. I was a good monk, and I kept the rule of my order so strictly that I may say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery it was I. All my brothers in the monastery who knew me will bear me out. If I had kept on any longer, I should have killed myself with vigils, prayers, reading, and other work.

All such drastic methods gave no sense of inner tranquillity. The purpose of his striving was to compensate for his sins, but he could never feel that the ledger was balanced. Some historians have therefore asserted that he must have been a very great sinner, and that in all likelihood his sins had to do with sex, where offenses are the least capable of any rectification. But Luther himself declared that this was not a particular problem. He had been chaste. While at Erfurt he had never even heard a woman in confession. And later at Wittenberg he had confessed only three women, and these he had not seen. Of

course he was no wood carving, but sexual temptation beset him no more than any other problem of the moral life. The trouble was that he could not satisfy God at any point. Commenting in later life on the Sermon on the Mount, Luther gave searching expression to his disillusionment. Referring to the precepts of Jesus he said: This word is too high and too hard that anyone should fulfill it. This is proved, not merely by our Lord's word, but by our own experience and feeling. Take any upright man or woman. He will get along very nicely with those who do not provoke him, but let someone proffer only the slightest irritation and he will flare up in anger, . . . if not against friends, then against enemies. Flesh and blood cannot rise above it. Luther simply had not the capacity to fulfill the conditions.

[After his trip to Rome, seeing the corruptions of the clergy there]-

By a like token the stories that came to Luther's ears of the

immorality of the Roman clergy should not logically have undermined his faith in the capacity of Holy Rome to confer spiritual benefits. At the same time he was horrified to hear that if there were a hell Rome was built upon it. He need not have been a scandalmonger to know that the district of ill fame was frequented by ecclesiastics. He heard there were those who considered themselves virtuous because they confined themselves to women. The unsavory memory of Pope Alexander VI was still a stench. Catholic historians recognize candidly the scandal of the Renaissance popes, and the Catholic Reformation was as greatly concerned as the Protestant to eradicate such abuses.

Yet all these sorry disclosures did not shatter Luther's confidence in the genuine goodness of the faithful. The question was whether they had any superfluous merit which could be conveyed to him or to his family, and whether the merit was so attached to sacred places that

visits would confer benefit. This was the point at which doubt overtook him. He was climbing Pilate's stairs on hands and knees repeating a Pater Noster for each one and kissing each step for good measure in the hope of delivering a soul from purgatory. Luther regretted that his own father and mother were not yet dead and in purgatory so that he might confer on them so signal a favor. Failing that, he had resolved to release Grandpa Heine. The stairs were climbed, the Pater Nosters were repeated, the steps were kissed. At the top Luther raised himself and exclaimed, not as legend would have it, "The just shall live by faith!"—he was not yet that far advanced. What he said was, "Who knows whether it is so?" That was the truly disconcerting doubt. The priests might be guilty of levity and the popes of lechery— all this would not matter so long as the Church had valid means of grace. But if crawling up the very stairs on which Christ stood and repeating all the prescribed prayers would be of

no avail, then another of the great grounds of hope had proved to be illusory. Luther commented that he had gone to Rome with onions and had returned with garlic.

And so Luther set out to seek his remedy through the various sacraments of the church. Listen further as Bainton tells us how Luther sought the necessary perfect righteousness through the Roman sacrament of *confession*:

The Failure of Confession. He sought at the same time to explore other ways, and Catholicism had much more to offer. Salvation was never made to rest solely nor even primarily upon human achievement. The whole sacramental system of the Church was designed to mediate to man God's help and favor. Particularly the sacrament of penance afforded solace, not to saints but to sinners. This only was required of them, that they should confess all their wrongdoing and seek absolution. Luther endeavored unremittingly to avail himself of this signal mercy. Without confession, he testified, the Devil would have devoured him long ago.

He confessed frequently, often daily, and for as long as six hours on a single occasion. Every sin in order to be

absolved was to be confessed. Therefore the soul must be searched and the memory ransacked and the motives probed. As an aid the penitent ran through the seven deadly sins and the Ten Commandments. Luther would repeat a confession and, to be sure of including everything, would review his entire life until the confessor grew weary and exclaimed, "Man, God is not angry with you. You are angry with God. Don't you know that God commands you to hope?"

This assiduous confessing certainly succeeded in clearing up any major transgressions. The leftovers with which Luther kept trotting in appeared to Staupitz to be only the scruples of a sick soul. "Look here," said he, "if you expect Christ to forgive you, come in with something to forgive—parricide, blasphemy, adultery—instead of all these peccadilloes." But Luther's question was not whether his sins were big or little, but whether they had been confessed. The great difficulty which he encountered was to be sure that everything had been recalled.

He learned from experience the cleverness of memory in protecting the ego, and he was frightened when after six hours of confessing he could still go out and think of something else which had eluded his most conscientious scrutiny. Still more disconcerting was the discovery that

some of man's misdemeanors are not even recognized, let alone remembered. Sinners often sin without compunction. Adam and Eve, after tasting of the fruit of the forbidden tree, went blithely for a walk in the cool of the day; and Jonah, after fleeing from the Lord's commission, slept soundly in the hold of the ship. Only when each was confronted by an accuser was there any consciousness of guilt. Frequently, too, when man is reproached he will still justify himself like Adam, who replied, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me"—as if to say to God, "She tempted me; you gave her to me; you are to blame."

There is, according to Luther, something much more drastically wrong with man than any particular list of offenses which can be enumerated, confessed, and forgiven. The very nature of man is corrupt. The penitential system fails because it is directed to particular lapses. Luther had come to perceive that the entire man is in need of forgiveness. In the course of this quest he had wrought himself into a state of emotional disturbance passing the bounds of objectivity. When, then, his confessor said that he was magnifying his misdemeanors, Luther could only conclude that the consultant did not understand the case and that none of the proffered consolations was of any avail.

In consequence the most frightful insecurities beset him. Panic invaded his spirit. The conscience became so disquieted as to start and tremble at the stirring of a wind-blown leaf. The horror of nightmare gripped the soul, the dread of one waking in the dusk to look into the eyes of him who has come to take his life. The heavenly champions all withdrew; the fiend beckoned with leering summons to the impotent soul. These were the torments which Luther repeatedly testified were far worse than any physical ailment that he had ever endured.

His description tallies so well with a recognized type of mental malady that again one is tempted to wonder whether his disturbance should be regarded as arising from authentic religious difficulties or from gastric or glandular deficiencies. The question can better be faced when more data become available from other periods of his life. Suffice it for the moment to observe that no malady ever impaired his stupendous capacity for work; that the problems with which he wrestled were not imaginary but implicit in the religion on which he had been reared; that his emotional reactions were excessive, as he would himself recognize after emerging from a depression; that he did make headway

in exhausting one by one the helps proffered by medieval religion.

He had arrived at a valid impasse. Sins to be forgiven must be confessed. To be confessed they must be recognized and remembered. If they are not recognized and remembered, they cannot be confessed. If they are not confessed, they cannot be forgiven. The only way out is to deny the premise. But that Luther was not yet ready to do. Staupitz at this point offered real help by seeking to divert his attention from individual sins to the nature of man. Luther later on formulated what he had learned by saying that the physician does not need to probe each pustule to know that the patient has smallpox, nor is the disease to be cured scab by scab. To focus on particular offenses is a counsel of despair. When Peter started to count the waves, he sank. The whole nature of man needs to be changed.

Bainton, Roland H. (2013-08-06). Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther (Kindle Locations 345-706). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

Do you see? Luther was not mentally ill. Unlike most around him, he saw the truth. He realized WHO GOD IS! And he realized WHO MARTIN LUTHER WAS! A holy God, perfect in holiness, can NOT be reconciled to a sinful man. His holy law curses such

a man and kills him. There is NOTHING such a creature can do to make himself holy and pure and fit to be in God's presence. Nothing. Luther knew this and was terrified. This is the work of the Law. It's letter kills. It is a ministry of death. And any system, such as Luther was in bondage to, or such as the Galatians were being tempted by, will only bring a person into condemnation, whether that person will admit it or not.

Conclusion:

Galatians 2:19 For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God.

We still have not moved into verse 20, which is an amazing statement of the gospel. But we will leave off here once more, with just one more important challenge for each one of us.

To one degree, some lesser and some greater, we are all still infected with the law in our thinking, so easily does it creep back upon us. And there are plenty of people who want to "bewitch us" in this regard. We must never permit them to do so or we will become monks.

One of the most certain signs of a mindset of being under the law, of still having to perform to earn God's favor or the favor of others is the fear/anger

dynamic. And I think we must all energetically search this out in our own lives. Where the Spirit of Christ is, there is liberty, freedom, peace, and joy. Where the law is, there is fear, and fear so often evidences itself in the form of anger. If you are an angry person, then ultimately you are a person who is, in some way, afraid. And probably afraid of God. Luther said that before he awakened to the truth of the gospel – justification by faith alone in Christ alone – he not only did not love God, he HATED God!

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Do you understand this? Really? Or are you still performing, still crawling up those stone stairs with Luther? Follow your anger. Follow it back to your fear, and ask the Lord to renew your mind in this area, showing you that you have died to the law in Christ and are now free. If YOU are dead to the law, and if CHRIST lives in you, then God IS pleased with you!! There is nothing left for you to prove or to earn.